

THE RESCUE

*A Melodrama for Broadcasting
based on Homer's Odyssey*

BY

EDWARD SACKVILLE-WEST

Orchestral Score by
BENJAMIN BRITTEN

With six illustrations to the text
by
HENRY MOORE

*"We do not want either Greek or Roman Models if
we are but just and true to our own Imaginations."*

BLAKE

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CAST

The Rescue was performed by the British Broadcasting Corporation on November 25th (Part I) and 26th (Part II), 1943.

The Cast was as follows:

PHEMIUS, the Poet	James McKechnie
A MOURNER.	Marion Browne
MENTOR	Harcourt Williams
EURYMACHUS	Cyril Gardiner
HALITHERSES.	Julian Somers
HIS WIFE.	Susan Richmond
MACHAON, his son	Michael Gainsborough
CALLIDICE	Pauline Wynn
IRUS	Esme Percy
LEODES	Reyner Barton
PENELOPE	Cathleen Nesbitt
EURYNOME, her maid . . .	Pauline Wynn
TELEMACHUS	John Byron
EURYCLEA	Grace Edwin
COXSWAIN	Julian Somers
SAILORS	{ Alan Blair Alexander Sarner Bryan Powley
ANTINOUS	Richard Williams
PEISANDER	Bernard Rebel
AGELAUS	Laidman Browne
AMPHINOMUS	Rudolph Offenbach
LEOCRITUS	{ <i>Suitors for the hand of Penelope</i> Alexander Sarner
CTESIPPUS	
EURYDAMAS	Heron Carvic
NOEMON	Bryan Powley
MELANTHIUS	George Woodbridge
ALASTOR	Julian Somers

CAST

ODYSSEUS	Denis Arundell
EUMAEUS	Michael Golden
MEDON, a herald	Charles Maunsell
ATHENE	Hedli Anderson
HERMES	Stephen Manton
APOLLO	Donald Monro
ARTEMIS.	Veronica Mansfield

The B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra was conducted by Clarence Raybould. Production by John Burrell.

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EXPLANATION OF TECHNICAL EXPRESSIONS USED IN THE TEXT

<i>Fade-up</i>	Bring music or speech into listener's foreground.
<i>Cross-fade</i>	Transfer listener gradually from sounds transmitted by one microphone to those transmitted by another.
<i>Music up and down</i>	Bring music up to listener's foreground, then fade behind speech.
<i>Music up and out</i>	Ditto, then fade altogether, before re-introducing speech.

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OPERA, the technique of which (despite innumerable abortive experiments) has been practically at a standstill since the deaths of Wagner and Verdi, was originally invented, as a distinct art form, by a nation in love with the declamation of verse : the Italians. It was suggested, by the group of writers and musicians which met at the house of Giovanni Bardi, in Florence, at the end of the sixteenth century, that if an actor, instead of allowing his voice to rise and fall vaguely with the sense of the line, actually focussed his syllables on definite notes, while an ensemble of instruments stressed the accents and pauses, the dramatic effect of verse would be heightened. In this way recitative was born. The aria and arioso followed, in course of time, when boredom with the monotony of unrelieved *recitativo secco* caused musicians to see the necessity of importing into the opera some purely musical forms already in existence. Since then, opera and music-drama generally have followed the development observable in all art forms—viz. a progressive fusion of once separate elements into a homogeneous texture which, in depth and poignancy of effect, transcends any single one.

It seems, however, to be a law of art, that when a technique attains a *ne plus ultra* it starts to return whence it came ; and if we take Strauss' *Elektra* as the point at our own end of the vista opened, in 1597, by Peri's *La Dafne*, I think we can see, in the *Sprechstimme* of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* and the operatic cantatas of Schönberg, the first step on the road which would lead in the end back to the almost pure declamation of the first opera. But the *Sprechstimme*—even in the hands of an expert performer—has never seemed to me a happy solution, because it is essentially a compromise, and in art compromises will not do. Falling between two stools, *Sprechstimme* lacks the advantage of speech, in being imperfectly comprehensible, while, judged from a purely musical point of view, it is always sufficiently " off pitch " to sound ugly. On the other hand the speaking voice, unassisted by devices of amplification, cannot in a theatre compete with a musical " background " without forcing itself and thus ruining its expressive qualities.

Experiments with the microphone for dramatic purposes have been going on for long enough to have produced attempts

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at some form of radio-opera or music-drama. So far as England is concerned, however, such attempts, if any, have not been very thorough-going or imaginative; the "backing" of speech by music is all too often carried out without regard to the kinds of scoring suitable to this effect, while "transition" music is usually reduced to perfunctory snatches (never lasting more than four or five seconds) bumped in and out of the sound-fabric with equally little respect for musical syntax. It will be said, I know, that the vast majority of listeners neither care nor notice how music is used in radio-dramatic productions; but I believe, on the contrary, that the *unconscious* effect of ineptly used music is as irritating and confusing as badly balanced voices or "recorded effects" that are not strictly necessary to the understanding of the text. Thus it is to a very large extent the unskilful (because unmusical) use of music in radio plays and features that has been responsible for the public's unquestionable hostility to the practice. There are, of course, a number of people who like some plays but dislike all music, and who therefore object to its use as a dramatic accessory. Their criticism is beside the point and should be as rigorously disregarded as, say, an objection to variations of lighting on the stage. But there are also many music-loving people who would not object to music used for this purpose, if only the choice and manner of use did not offend their sense of what is appropriate.

It is to this last (after all very large) public that *The Rescue* is addressed. I have sub-titled the piece "a melodrama," using the word in its original sense, *i.e.* "a play, usually romantic and sensational in plot and incident, in which songs are interspersed and in which the action is accompanied by orchestral music appropriate to the situations". This definition, taken from the Oxford English Dictionary, exactly describes *The Rescue*. My play is romantic and sensational because the *Odyssey* has that character, not because it is the only kind of drama suited to the microphone. Radio is in fact susceptible of carrying far more *degrees* of dramatisation than the stage or the screen, because of the extreme flexibility of the medium and its wide powers of imaginative suggestion. Even the "straight" talk has an element of drama in it, conferred by the listener's focus on the personality of the unseen speaker, and by the shape of the talk itself, which has to be designed to grip and hold attention from first to last. Even the static discussion, of which the Platonic dialogue, Landor's *Imaginary Conversations*, Sacha

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Guitry's *Pasteur*, and the Brains Trust, are examples, is a legitimate form of radio-drama, though too little exploited through fear that listeners will find it dull or stiff. From the moment that the central narration becomes interspersed with characterised voices, used for illustrative purposes like pictures in a book, drama becomes overt. This is perhaps the most characteristic, as it is certainly the most usual, form of dramatised broadcast, and it has great advantages: it is unambiguous, admits of extreme compression of the material in hand, and is relatively easy to manage. But it has one major snag: dramatic rise and fall—the build-up without which drama cannot but fail—is apt to elude those who favour this form of programme. The word *artist* means *joiner*, and the artist in radio composition is (perhaps more evidently than any other) one who joins things together—words, music, all manner of sounds. But whatever is joined must make a ring, not a straight ribbon. All too many broadcasts of this kind are simply tape-measures pulled out to a certain length. The effect of this is lame and pointless, yet it is the chief mistake which all inexperienced script-writers tend to make.

Fully dramatised scripts—those which dispense with a Narrator—do not incur the same risk, but they are immeasurably more difficult to manipulate, because of the supreme importance of making clear, *without seeming to do so*, who is speaking, where, and why. Confusion must be avoided at all costs, yet the action must not be held up by mere “pointers”. At the same time, if the material permits of a direct continuity of dramatic sequences, which explain themselves, the gain—from the listener's point of view—is very considerable, for the introduction of the Narrator's voice, even when disguised as a character in the play, always makes for a drop in the temperature of the programme. There are various recognised devices for obviating this difficulty, and of these music is not the least useful, so long as it joins together the disparate elements instead of forcing them apart.

In writing *The Rescue* some of the awkwardnesses incident to radio-drama were automatically removed for me by the operatic nature of the composition, which was deliberately built upon an hypothetical structure of music. Yet to those versed in all the tricks that have been invented for rendering spatial and temporal elements “on the air”, the construction of *The Rescue* will appear unusually simple. The scenes and events follow one another in their natural order; there is no tampering with the time sequence, there are no flash-backs, no

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parallel intercuts¹ (except in one section, during the killing of the suitors in Part II), no elaborate sound effects (outside the music), and the voices are always reproduced in a straightforward manner, without the use of distort- or echo-microphones. This austerity is deliberate, for I am convinced that—especially in broadcasting—a love of stunts is the sign of a tyro. Even a short experience of untrained script-writers is enough to disclose the intoxicating result of reading the catalogue of Recorded Effects. Useless to warn beforehand: the newcomer to radio-drama cannot resist cramming his script with everything, from a hyaena to a motor accident, for which his story provides the slightest excuse. In such a case a complete cure can be effected by allowing the writer to listen to ten minutes of his script rehearsed exactly as he has written it. The result is so obviously fussy and amateurish that he is only too willing to leave two-thirds of his "effects" where they should be—in the listener's imagination.

With a very few important exceptions (trains, cars, doors opening and shutting, and the like) there are no sound effects which cannot be rendered "on the air" with incomparably greater imaginative accuracy by music. But here again it is necessary to enter a warning: Never use music when the words or the action are self-sufficient. If you do, you weaken its effect at those points where nothing but music can support and carry forward the burden of feeling, suggest a transition of time or place, or sketch the outline of a gesture. This warning of course applies less to compositions like *The Rescue* than to the more naturalistic type of play, in which music cues may or may not have been allowed for by the writer and are in any case often added by the producer merely to colour a speech here and there or to fill in a gap in the action.

Questions of time, space, transition, and action are perhaps the chief problems which the artist in radio has to solve, but there are others, less superficial, of which the most important concerns the *visual* element. Many, if not most, radio-dramatists either neglect this entirely or deal with it perfunctorily, as if it did not matter. In some cases this attitude is quite justifiable,²

A double series of very brief sequences, alternating between one place (or one period) and another, in order to build up an aggregate effect by means of the contrasts involved.

² "Un-visual" radio-drama is a genre by itself, with its own rules of construction. Those who heard Louis MacNeice's *He Had a Date* will not have forgotten this extremely clever example of scene-less composition.

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but far more often it is the direct cause of the dullness, flatness, and vulgarity of which radio-drama is so frequently accused. A considerable effort of the writer's imagination is required, if the listener is to receive anything like a vivid image of what is taking place—the scene, the appearance of the characters, the lighting, and so on. *This can only be done successfully by indirect suggestion.* It is, for instance, no use whatever to give a Narrator some such words as: "We are in the library at Farthingale and Sir Henry has just thrown another log upon the blazing fire". If you want the listeners to *see* the library and Sir Henry and the fire, you must contrive to make the characters refer to them in an evocative manner.

This method is a constant feature of *The Rescue*, and though it is not for me to say whether or not it is successfully managed, the reader will observe it in almost every sequence of the play. It was indeed essential that, in view of the scenario I had chosen and the length of each part, the listener's mind should be furnished with something besides a series of disembodied voices. The scene in Part I, in which Phemius invokes the gods for the benefit of Telemachus, not only furthers the action but provides a clue to the dramatic method.*

I have said that the construction of the play is—for radio—unusually simple. The sequence of events, as well as the use of the orchestra, made it possible for me to dispense with a Narrator. The speeches of Athene, which open both parts of the play, can of course be regarded as narration, but they are in both cases mere introductions, and once they are over the action proceeds uninterrupted. How this action was arrived at perhaps needs a little explanation.

The plot of the *Odyssey*, like that of many other intrinsically romantic poems, is far from simple: the characters are many and varied, the centre of the action changes constantly, and even the story is not discreet in itself but has roots (which are sometimes followed) in that earlier sequence of events told in the *Iliad*. The construction of the poem is a masterpiece of cunning, so that, when I had the idea of using the story as the basis of a poetic drama for broadcasting, I expected to follow Homer's plan as closely as possible. But it soon became clear that, in order to include everything, my play would have to last some nine hours. As this was not thought feasible, I decided to narrow the focus down on to the events of two single days, and in such a way as to extract the maximum of dramatic

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interest from certain characters in the story: Odysseus and Penelope, their son Telemachus, the poet Phemius, Odysseus' old friend the swineherd Eumaeus, and the goddess Athene herself. To do this meant excluding what is perhaps the best known part of the whole story—the episodes of the hero's journey (Cyclops, Circe, and the rest)—except by reference and implication, and also the scenes at the Palace of Menelaus in Sparta: large omissions indeed, but, when made, leaving material and to spare for a three-hour play.

In making this rather drastic scenario, my chief regrets were the Spartan scenes and the magnificent episode of Odysseus' invocation of the famous dead. The former would have given opportunities for humour: Menelaus is not a dignified prince, and a first glimpse of Helen employed on the same kind of endless knitting as that which filled Penelope's days, must have awoken a *Plus ça change . . . !* in the disappointed breast of the young Telemachus. The episodes of these central books of the *Odyssey* alone are packed with enough amusing and thrilling material to make a dramatist's mouth water; but the invocation of the dead, and especially the dialogue between Odysseus and his mother, are in the original so exciting to the poetic imagination that I found it hard to resist an attempt to include them in my script. But in radio, even more than in the theatre, a closely knit crescendo is as much a necessity of the form as unity of theme, and red herrings, however appetising, must be rigorously excluded.

In handling the characters I attempted to rescue them from the remote limbo created by the incredible style of the Butcher and Lang translation (a task made easier by T. E. Lawrence) and to present listeners with people in whose emotions and actions it is possible for the men and women of our time to be interested. For instance, it seemed to me more worth while to try to present Penelope as a real woman, with the mind and problems common to many middle-aged women as well as those that were special to her own case, than to leave her in the over-emphatic chiaroscuro of legend. Her suitors, again, I have chosen to display in a semi-comic light, for two reasons: because Homer himself does so, and because gangsters, Fascists, and other childish persons are, when looked at by themselves, essentially figures of farce.

For the startling parallel between the story, as I have told it, and the present state of Greece, I make no apology. It was too

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obvious to require underlining, but its continual presence in my own mind did, I believe, contribute something both to the character-drawing and to the balance of the action.

The role of Phemius has an importance in the play far outweighing that allotted to him by Homer, and here again the reason is not far to seek. As Prologue and Epilogue he speaks for myself, and indeed throughout the play his role is ambiguous and Harlequinesque. He is the Poet, rather than any particular one, and I have tried to invest him with something of the mysterious timelessness, the knife-edge balance between being and not-being, which only the poetic imagination seems able to achieve. In what is on the whole a most objective work, Phemius alone is given the licence to express some of my own feelings about the world which is common to us both.

The style in which the dialogue is written was the outcome to two factors in combination : my attitude to the story and the characters, and my decision to embody them in a form of music-drama dictated solely by the peculiarities of the medium. As my friend and colleague, Louis MacNeice, has pointed out, in the preface to his energetic and thrilling *Christopher Columbus*, a considerable degree of stylisation is essential in radio-drama. Whether this takes the form of recurrent sound-patterns, of musical framing, or of "unrealistic" speech, depends on the nature of the script. In the case of *The Rescue* the stylisation consists partly in the musical framework and partly in an elastic diction ranging from naturalistic phraseology to a highly literary style of speech. When the play was performed, some critics complained of what seemed to them an inadmissibly sudden change of style from one passage to another. I think this criticism may be justified ; but if so, the reason lies in maladroitness on my part, rather than in anything inherently objectionable in the procedure. In the Elizabethan and Jacobean period audiences found no difficulty in accepting dramatic poets who jumped continually from vernacular prose to the highest-flown blank verse and back again. In *The Rescue* I have followed those great examples, though I have not tried to imitate their style.

The variations in the temper of the speech do not, I feel, need further comment ; but two further points must be made. With the exception of the set of nursery rhymes on page 30, and of the introductory speeches to both parts of the play, the whole composition is written in *prose*. The appearance of the

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page often suggests what is known as "free verse", and anyone who prefers that (to me) meaningless phrase is welcome to apply it here. My only object in cutting up my prose lines into different lengths was the consideration that they were going to be spoken—in other words, to assist the actors in giving their speeches a rhythm and a variety of emphasis, complex perhaps, but differing as much in effect from a verse rhythm as a spoken word differs from a sung one. In the course of rehearsal I found this procedure amply justified.

The other stylistic feature that seems worthy of comment is the use of soliloquy. Anyone who has experimented with radio must soon have realised that never since the turn of the sixteenth century has a dramatic medium been discovered so ideally suited to the individual meditation. The intimacy of the microphone—the fact that the speaker is addressing each listener personally—the absence of that awkwardness, which is nowadays felt in the theatre when an actor addresses the audience: these considerations alone must prompt a poet to avail himself of so expressive an opportunity. From this point the next step, which consisted in adding an orchestral commentary in such a way as to produce the effect of a new kind of *aria*, was not slow to occur to me. In actual performance my own impression was that these soliloquies, together with the "magic" sequences (Phemius' invocation of the gods and the Naiads' revelation to Odysseus in Part I, Athene's drawing of Odysseus' shadow profile in Part II) and the scene of Odysseus' awakening in the cave, were far more successful than the storm sequence or the killing of the suitors—passages in which the disadvantages of the medium were most evident.

Readers, hardly less than those who heard the broadcast, will not fail to notice that the passages I have mentioned as succeeding better than others are exactly those in which the speech-music texture is closest. And here the *kind* of music suitable to radio-drama comes in question. The type of orchestration usually associated with films will not do at all, because it is far too uniformly thick and, if used behind speech, has to be taken so far back as to be scarcely audible. Such a combination of sounds lacks all significance. Where speech and music are used together, the music must be clearly audible but sufficiently transparent in texture to leave the speaking voice always in the foreground. This makes it possible for the listener to concentrate on the words, allowing the musical background

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to form as it were a frame of shapes and colours which illuminate and set off the ideas and images expressed in the text.

In discussing the composition of the score with Benjamin Britten it was the question of the speech-music texture which exercised us most, since it is usually the most neglected. A large ensemble seemed necessary, if only because a small one is invariably more obtrusive: it is, paradoxically, impossible to produce an overall orchestral pianissimo without using a considerable body of instruments, whereas a double *forte* requires only the minimum. Britten's resolution of the problem was, as most of the critics admitted, on all occasions magnificently correct. Apart from this the musical aspect of the composition did not present much technical difficulty; choral comment is provided by the quartet of gods and goddesses who actually sing; the rest of the music is concerned with scene-painting, characterisation (carried out mainly by associating a single instrument with a particular person—e.g. the Bach trumpet with Athene, the xylophone with the quisling Irus, the alto saxophone with Penelope, the string orchestra with Odysseus), the representation of gesture and movement and of all sounds usually rendered by "recorded effects" (rain, wind, thunder, and so on), and lastly the transitions from one scene to another.

It is in these transitional passages that I feel the composer and I made our one major miscalculation. In a short script, where a scene rarely lasts for more than six minutes, fifteen or twenty seconds of music is amply sufficient to supply the link; but in a ninety-minute script the links should be proportionately longer, because the listener's mind becomes more firmly anchored in a scene the longer it lasts. Thus, in Part II of *The Rescue* the transition music which should carry the listener with Odysseus and Telemachus on their journey down the mountain, signally failed to do so because, coming after a scene which had lasted thirty minutes, the imagination demanded a more spacious relaxation. And there were other points at which the dramatic burden needed a fuller support from the orchestra.

About the beauty and appropriateness of Britten's score as it stands, I never had any doubts. A good many critics thought it the best part of the programme, and I shall not quarrel with their opinion. As I have been at pains to emphasise, both then and now, *The Rescue* was designed as a melodrama: music plays an integral part in it and the dramatic structure was planned with a view to giving the composer at least as many opportunities

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as myself. So I will ask readers of the play to bear in mind that in those sections where music is present the words are not intended to be self-subsistent. It is for this reason that I have left the script just as it stood, music cues and all, instead of attempting to refurbish it in the interests of what might seem superior readability.¹ *The Rescue* was an experiment—an adventure, and its interest (if any) resides at least as much in its suggestive value for other writers as in any independent poetic merit it may possess.

My debts of gratitude, with regard to the performance of *The Rescue*, are many. The first is due to the British Broadcasting Corporation for sponsoring what must have seemed a hazardously large and expensive venture. My thanks are also due to the technical personnel who dealt, most expertly, with many difficult problems of sound-balance; to Clarence Raybould and the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra, for their enthusiasm in endeavouring to realise the composer's intentions; and to Anthony Hopkins, for his invaluable help during rehearsals.

My deepest gratitude, however, goes to two people: to Benjamin Britten, for a score which at every point surpassed my highest expectations; and to John Burrell, whose indefatigable exertions, unflinching adroitness, imagination, and tact, achieved a production which would otherwise, in the circumstances, have been impossible.

It only remains for me to express my great admiration for the drawings with which Henry Moore has illustrated the text.

¹ That Louis MacNeice has followed the opposite course in the published edition of *Christopher Columbus*, points the difference of aim in the two compositions. Where *The Rescue* is essentially operatic, *Columbus* is a kind of pageant in the production of which the music played a subsidiary, in the strictest sense incidental, role; and the play "reads" admirably without reference to the quantity of music which accompanied it.

In the course of writing this essay I have tried to avoid the ground more than ably covered by Mr. MacNeice's preface to his play. In fact I would advise the reader to regard this preamble as merely supplementing his remarks, from the point of view of an aim which, in this one case, differs entirely from that of *Columbus*. Those who are thinking of broadcasting as a field for their own efforts, would do better to read Mr. MacNeice, whose admirable exegesis is of much wider application than my own.



PART ONE

PHEMIUS (*prologises*).

What solitary sail leans to the wind
Upon my steady sea ? What summer light
Draws my horizon's taut and silver line ?
Mediterranean vision—in the pause
Between to-morrow of the perfected arch
And yesterday of ruined, friable stone—
Corrects the northern mind, straightens the eye,
And welds again to speech the broken sob.
Plain-song of columns, trireme, siren's hair :
These are the signs at sunset, these the airs
Which weave the valid spell, which limn the life
From age to age unaltered, and redeem
The Gothic North's inordinate desire.
Let us go home to this—only to this :
Accept the image of the simple house ;
Ghost-shadow of the olive ; secret grove
Of salt-wind-stunted oaks ; the ruthless omen
Of eagles' flight ; the voice among the leaves ;
Snake in the stone and swallow on the sea ;
The heavy-lidded eave ; the blind white wall.
Exist alone in light, forswear the hour
Of northern ghosts, the zero hour of fear,
That nadir of the spirit which destroys
Th' eternal present of the human heart,
Fashioned with hands, near to the roots of life.
(*Orchestral Prelude, then gradually out behind speech.*)

ATHENE. Eight years have passed since I,
Athene of the Shining Spear, called also
Saviour of Cities,
Watched Troy fall to dust.
After ten years of war,
Their task accomplished,

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Noble Menelaus avenged,
The men of Greece sailed back
To bleak-hilled Thrace,
To rich Lacedaemon, and
The unnumbered and innumerable isles.
Yet not all reached their homes, for Poseidon,
The Earth-Shaker, the Implacable,
Thinking they held his power of too little account,
Hurled their stout ships on rocky shores,
And many perished. Among them
Odysseus,
Lord of sea-girt Ithaca,
Favoured by my especial love
And by Poseidon's especial hate,
Fared hardest of all, for they
From whose hands not even the gods can preserve
mankind
In the end,
Refused Odysseus the peace of death.
For eighteen years he has not seen
The face of home, nor
His fair wife, white-armed Penelope ;
And his son, the slim Telemachus, has grown to
manhood
Without the steady light
Of a father's face, and his stern love.
Worse still, the island
Its men and women,
Have fallen victims to the gradual oppressor.
Neighbours, insidious as they are greedy,
Batten upon Odysseus' lands,
And upon his people,
And lately even upon his wife,
To whose heart each lays siege—
As yet in vain.
Their weapons are Agony and Humiliation :
ordeals
Hard to bear.

(Music to background and hold.)

Not all have remained steadfast. Yet some,
Withal a decreasing number,

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Trust in an end of grief. They watch,
By day and by night,
In hope of Odysseus' return,
Never permitting despair to overwhelm their
hearts.

(Music up and down.)

Even at this moment, in the gathering dawn,
I see the aged Mentor,
Watchman of Odysseus' home,
Mounting to his post on the tower by the sea,
To relieve his mate, Areïthous, of the night watch ;
While near to me, at the edge of my robe,
O grief ! O shame !
A mother and daughter with raised voices
Implore my aid against those who
In overweening pride
Walk hand in hand with Death.

(Music up. Add two female voices singing a sad strain in some minor mode, in the distance. One voice leaves off suddenly, the other fades away behind the orchestra. Lose behind speech.)

MENTOR *(in the fifties)*. Five years ago I could make these stairs at a run. Now look at me !

(Puffs and blows : general sounds of weariness.)

(F/u single voice singing again in distance then fade.)

Keening again ! That means another death up in the village. There won't be many of us left soon, at this rate. Ah, well ! I'll soon be over age for this job ! Forty years in the family : not bad !

By Zeus ! Was that a head I saw poke out through the opening down there ? My eyes are not what they were. Nights are dark, too, just now, and the torches are made of bad stuff . . . don't burn like they used to.

(Music up and down.)

There it is again—not the same place, though.

(Chuckles.) This tower's alive with heads.

(Calls, in a low voice.) Areïthous ! Areïthous !

That you ?

(Music up and out)

THE RESCUE

Must have dreamed it . . . this heat ! . . . not
a breath of air, week after week. . . . It's
months now since we had a proper breeze.
The Gods have taken against us.

(Very distant thunder up and out.)

Yes, great Earth-Shaker. I've heard that before—
we all have.

(F/u music to background and hold.)

Round and round,
Round and round and round,
But always just beyond the far horizon of the
dark sea, never nearer.

Never a drop of rain, never a breath ;
And overhead a leaden bowl, without a flaw,
For day and for night.

(Music up and out.)

This stone coping, pah ! It sweats like my own
body. No lights. When I came up there was
one gleam in that cottage where they were
keening the child. Now the hillside is black as
a ship's hull.

(Music to background.)

But in the Great House over there—*his* house—
there is light enough. What a blaze ! Those
sorners burn enough torches in one night to
light the whole island for a month.

(Music up and suddenly out.)

There he is again ! *(Calls.)* Areithous ! Can't
you hear me ? What's keeping you ? Dawn's
near—though Apollo's hair has lost its gold.

VOICE *(on filter or dead side of mike, but very distinct and impersonal. It is a voice used to a large vocabulary, but not professorial).* It is not Areithous.

MENTOR. Wha—what was that ?

VOICE. Don't lean out so far, Mentor, or you may fall
over. We're none of us in the best of health
these days, and this tower is high, as I heard
you observe.

MENTOR. Phemius ? Is that Phemius the bard ? What are
you doing up here ? This tower's out of
bounds for you.

THE RESCUE

PHEMIUS. There are no bounds for those who watch.

MENTOR. That is a true word.

Every man and woman in the island, save those
black-hearted and craven who have gone over
to the usurpers,

Keep constant watch, though they pretend to be
engaged on other tasks.

(Music to background and hold.)

Their eyes are open into every wind,

For a first sight of his sail

And the black hull of his ship.

Once—was it two—three years since?—

A peaked sail stood in from the north-west at
early dawn ;

And I thought it was his.

A grey peak on the horizon,

No more.

In that moment joy

Came flooding back into my heart

And I was young again.

But the sail disappeared

Suddenly,

Like a lamp blown out,

And there was nothing left save the dusky wave

Driving landward—alone.

Then my heart, which I had thought was strong
enough to

Bear whatever the gods might send

A man like me,

Died a death.

(Music up and out.)

PHEMIUS. Yet here you are still—still watching. *(Pause.*
Then, close to mike.) Ah ! There's more air
here on top of the tower.

MENTOR. Umph ! Watch ! What else could I do ? What
else can any of us do ? The gods have taken
against us.

PHEMIUS. Do you blame them ? We've given in. The
gods only respect those who continually resist
their fate,

Mounting the current.

THE RESCUE

MENTOR. And who are you, Phemius the bard, to talk to us of giving in? You who live on in the great house—"his" house—eating the food the invaders steal from us, and buttering them up with your songs . . . telling each drunken swine how great-hearted he is, how handsome, how skilful with the bow—

PHEMIUS (*laughs*). That's my favourite line! Not one of them can shoot straight.

MENTOR. Well then—

PHEMIUS. What would you have me do?

MENTOR. You could refuse to sing for them, after all—

PHEMIUS. Mentor, I have a wife and two children—one of them young and delicate—

MENTOR. So have others—

PHEMIUS. And what has happened to them?
Answer me that!

(*Music up and to background.*)

MENTOR. They have been forced to furnish ten head of cattle instead of five;

Thirty skins of wine instead of twelve;

Their holdings have been wittled away and given to the obsequious;

Their children have died of want (one died to-night: you heard . . .)

Their daughters have been sent to the palace to wait on the usurpers—and sleep with them

(*Music out.*)

and spy on our mistress, the Lady Penelope.

All that and more, Phemius.

Yet they have not given in.

PHEMIUS. Yes. You are right—and I am ashamed.

But it is not as simple for me as for some of you.

I have a special talent: some day it will be needed,

To celebrate "his" home-coming;

Meanwhile, there are certain things I can do . . .

Hark! What was that?

(*Music to background.*)

MENTOR. I heard nothing—The dawn

Is slow and silent.

It will bring no change.

THE RESCUE

The sea is dark as a mussel-shell ;
And on the grey wall of the sky
The fishers' masts stand straight
With never a sail . . .
With never a slanting sail.

(Music up and out suddenly.)

PHEMIUS. Listen ! There it is again.

A little sound,
At the bottom of the tower,
As if someone had stumbled and hurt himself.

MENTOR. Still I hear nothing—

Nothing but the usual morning stir.
At the well on the quay. Remember,
This is the hour when sounds begin.

PHEMIUS *(suddenly very matter-of-fact)*. I'm going down.

Come with me, Mentor.

MENTOR. But—

PHEMIUS. I ask for your own sake, not for mine.

(Music up and out suddenly on a sharp note.)

(Sharp intake of breath, then—on dead side of mike.)

Mentor ! Come quickly !

(Descending steps approach.)

No, wait !

(Steps halt.)

MENTOR. What have you found, Phemius ? What new
horror has dried the words in your throat ?

PHEMIUS. Come down, then, Mentor. Face the familiar
world again, at man's height.

(Pause.)

MENTOR *(very low)*. You can pull your cloak aside,
Phemius. I did not need to look on his face,
to recognise so old a friend

Areïthous ! Where is the wound ?

PHEMIUS. Wound, man ! The knife of Hunger strikes from
inside, not out. Look at his face—the colour
of burnished copper—and drawn tight over the
bones.

MENTOR *(to himself)*. Such things do not happen over-
night. How was it I did not see ?

PHEMIUS. There would be help near—

MENTOR. It is too late for that. And where—?

THE RESCUE

PHEMIUS. Down there. By the fountain.

(Music to background.)

The light grows, and I see Halitherses, and his wife and son and daughter mending their nets.

MENTOR. I noticed his boat was beached. Halitherses is too old a hand to waste his nights hauling sea water. Who else do you see? Your eyes are better than mine—

PHEMIUS. I see—overtopping the rest by half a head—Eurymachus.

MENTOR. He who would fly both with the vulture and its prey.

PHEMIUS. Eurymachus, who owns the richest vineyards on the island. He of the proud, handsome face. Uncertain of himself . . . unhappy . . . afraid . . .

MENTOR. In arms against the unarmed.

(Full transition music—then lose behind speech.)

EURYMACHUS *(early thirties : a domineering, adolescent voice)*. It is useless to complain, Halitherses. I should have expected you to have more sense of responsibility—

HALITHERSES *(grave, a little rough)*. I am ten years older than you are, Eurymachus. My duty as a citizen of Ithaca is what it is—

EURYMACHUS. I know! I know! You have said so before, We have different conceptions—

HALITHERSES. There is only one true conception of duty—

EURYMACHUS. If you would allow me to finish my sentence—

WIFE. Eurymachus's right, husband : complaining alters nothing.

MACHAON. Maybe, Mother, but action does.

EURYMACHUS *(sharply)*. You take my advice, Machaon son of Halitherses, and stick to your job.

MACHAON. And what am I doing? Take a hand at mending these nets, Eurymachus, and then talk to me about a job of work. A tear as big as your head in them every two days! They're as rotten as everything else in this island. Look here . . . and here . . . The hemp tears as soon as look at it!

HALITHERSES. They were good nets, too.

THE RESCUE

MACHAON. And if they werc, Father ! What's the use of good nets, when fish won't come into them ? Once, each moon would bring us a sayne—so many they burst the net. Now the fish have forsaken the sea round Ithaca : they love the swift-racing currents, and the waters all about us have grown slow and sluggish.

MOTHER. It is hard—very hard . . . Oyé ! This jar is heavy on my shoulder, now it's full. I never used to feel it.

MACHAON. Give it to me, Mother—

HALITHERSES. Callidice ! Daughter ! Help your mother.

CALLIDICE. I can't do two things at once, Father.

Can't you see I've got both hands full of this net ?

MACHAON. I'll take it. I could drink it all at a draught—every drop ! I feel so weak !

MOTHER. Don't fret, boy. We know you do your best for us. It's not your fault.

EURYMACHUS. Exactly ! So stop complaining . . . What's past is past. You only harden the gods' anger against you . . . hankering for "his" rule again. It's no good. We've got to get used to something different . . . for the sake of the island.

(Machaon laughs jeeringly.)

You people—

HALITHERSES. So you exclude yourself then, Eurymachus ?

EURYMACHUS. Don't split hairs, Halitherses. I'm telling you this for your good.

MACHAON *(quietly)*. Are you ? For your own, more like !

EURYMACHUS. What do you mean by that, Machaon ?

(During the last three speeches the intermittent whirr of a wooden rattle has been heard approaching. It is now quite close.)

MACHAON. Hark ! . . . Father, hark ! . . . Yes, I thought it was . . . look ! Here comes that little pimp Irus, with his curled hair and his new clothes . . .

CALLIDICE. What's wrong with him ?

MACHAON. What's wrong ? Hark at her, Mother—hark at her ! Your daughter defending the meanest little sneak in the island—"their" spy—

THE RESCUE

“ their ” messenger—he who brings bad news with a spiteful smile, and wrings food from the starving, or takes a bribe to stay away—till next time. He who is everywhere at once, behind every door, under every window . . . listening . . . lying . . .

(*Loud whirr of rattle. Clf music up and to background.*)

IRUS (*a sinister clown*). Whom have we here? Friends or enemies? Both . . . always and everywhere both! (*Mad laugh and quick orchestral gesture, up and out.*) You can't deceive Irus: he's too quick. Practice makes perfect, in every art. (*Ditto.*) Art? Who says I'm not an artist? Halitherses? Leodes? Phemius? Do you doubt my cunning? Would you dare? (*Ditto.*) I sell anything that's not my own (*twirl of rattle*)—secrets, trophies, the chiton off your back, the sandal you thought you had left behind the door when you ran out in a hurry to tether the goat I unloosed . . . (*Another laugh and music up and out; in a whisper.*) A child died last night. Here is its shift . . . look!

(*Laugh and music up and out.*)

You'd kill me if you could, wouldn't you?

(*Music up and out.*)

But you can't. (*Importantly.*) I'm protected. Just try and see what happens to you!

(*Laugh and music up and out.*)

But why turn pale, worthy Halitherses? I have no business with you to-day—no command to hand on. Yet there is one amongst you who brings me this way. I bear a message,

EURYMACHUS (*quickly*). For me?

HALITHERSES (*laughs*). It would not be for one of us, Eurymachus.

(*Screech of silly laughter from Irus and twirl of rattle.*)

EURYMACHUS. Well, what is it?

IRUS. I may not speak it aloud, sir. Come apart with me and let me whisper it in your ear. (*Fade.*)

THE RESCUE

MACHAON (*with repressed fury*). And we sit with unclenched hands and let it happen to us ! Father, why don't we *do* something ? There's only a handful of them—Damastor, and Melanthius (he's always half-seas-over), and Amphinomus, and——

VOICE. No names ! Don't say names !

MACHAON. Leodes ! Leodes here ?

LEODES. Better not name people——

HALITHERSES. Were I the goddess, Leodes, I would be ashamed to be served by such as you.

LEODES. It is the business of a priest to interpret signs, Halitherses. I do that.

PHEMIUS (*approaching*). So do I.

HALITHERSES. Phemius ! We have no quarrel with you. You are a poet and loyal in your heart—as we are—Athene be our witness.

LEODES. I also——

VOICES. No ! No !

PHEMIUS (*near*). You are slow, Leodes. A sign is even now above your head.

EXCITED (*Music up and down.*)

VOICES (*with distance*).

There they are !

Where ?

There ! Birds . . .

Eagles—a pair . . .

Against the cliff edge.

(*Music up and down.*)

PHEMIUS. Look there ! Look how they rip and tear at one another's necks with their sharp talons.

CALLIDICE (*excitedly*). Blood ! Blood has fallen upon my hand !

MACHAON. They are flying out to sea . . .

(*Music fades gradually out.*)

EURYMACHUS. What is all this turmoil about ?

MOTHER. Did you not see the eagles ? It was a sign . . .

EURYMACHUS. Eagles ! By the fuss you folks make about a couple of birds, anyone would think you had never seen one before.

IRUS (*twirls rattle sharply*). Besides, they weren't eagles ; I saw them, they were only gulls.

THE RESCUE

MACHAON. Are you telling us we don't know an eagle when we see one, you little——!

IRUS (*screech of laughter, fading*).

LEODES. Besides, even if they were, they had no significance—none whatever. (*Fade.*)

PREMIUS. You lie, Leodes. I take the word from your unworthy lips.

(*Music up, then to background and hold.*)

My friends, listen to me.

I am sad, as you are. But

This is no time to give up hope.

We are on the final brink.

We have waited for Demeter to send her messenger, the crane: that was for us the sign; but

It did not come. Instead,

High Zeus has sent his own.

The rain will come soon: that will be the sign

That Poseidon's anger is spent,

And the storm that has tossed our friend and lord hither and thither for eight years,

Will cradle him at last,

Like a child, in his own home.

Be patient only a little longer, citizens of Ithaca!

The rain is coming.

Then you will know that he is here,

Though it may be a little time before he discovers himself to you. But

He will be here among us,

Under the mantle of slant-eyed Hermes,

Hooded by the propitious eyelid of Night,

Planning the great day of rescue for Ithaca, and justice

For the men who have woven you days—months—years of toil and grief.

Wait for the rain.

(*Music up. Cross-fade Irus' rattle.*)

IRUS (*whispering*). Callidice! Callidice!

CALLIDICE. Go away, Irus, someone will see.

IRUS. Come in under this arch. There's no one about. There!

THE RESCUE

CALLIDICE. Keep your hands off !

IRUS. You promised—

CALLIDICE (*giggles*). And what did you promise *me* ?

IRUS. A comb of silver and ivory—look !

CALLIDICE. Give it me ! Give !

IRUS. Tell me what I want to know. Then you shall have it.

CALLIDICE. I don't know—*aïe* ! You're hurting my hand !
Let go of me, little beast !

IRUS. Not till you tell me how it is the Lady Penelope manages never to finish her weaving.

CALLIDICE. I know nothing about it.

IRUS. Of course you do—everybody does. I mean the shroud my lady is weaving for her dead lord. She has made a vow not to choose another husband till it's finished.

CALLIDICE. How should I know ? I left the palace a month ago.

IRUS. You—why ?

CALLIDICE. Because I got sick of being bossed by that witch Euryclea—

IRUS (*giggles*). Lord Telemachus's old nurse ?

CALLIDICE. Yes. Old she is, and she might still be his nurse. He needs one.

IRUS. Did he come after you, Callidice ?

CALLIDICE. After *me*, Irus ? Never looked at me, that I could see ! Never looks at girls at all, I should say . . . just moons about, as if he'd lost something. His mother—

IRUS. Yes, tell me now, and you shall have the comb. Look ! It's real ! Run your fingers over the chasing . . . 'm ? Come now !

CALLIDICE. She—

IRUS. It's all right, you needn't look round, there's nobody about.

CALLIDICE. Well . . . Madam counts her stitches very, very carefully—all day. And at night—

IRUS. Yes ? At night . . .

CALLIDICE. At night she unpicks them . . . two hundred, three hundred . . . whatever the number is . . . never more . . . never less . . .

(*Triumphant twirl of rattle.*)

THE RESCUE

(Cross-fade music—(Fileuse)—very quiet and distant at first, then coming gradually nearer through the following sequence.)

IRUS. Two hundred and eight
Till the hour is late.

(Twirl of rattle.)

Three hundred and nine
When the day is fine.

(Twirl.)

Five hundred and six
She's at her tricks.

(Twirl.)

With daylight's call
She starts the sum ;
Then plucks them all
When night is come.

(Prolonged twirl of rattle—fade into music full up, then out behind dialogue.)

PENELOPE *(dull, level tone : a voice with many and startling inflections, sometimes betraying the fatigue of middle age, but capable still of a vibrant dignity and a subacid perception.)*

Thirty-four . . . thirty-six . . . seven . . . eight
. . . Eurynome ! My head aches to-day . . .

EURYNOME *(young, "devoted," rather prim).* Shall I pull the curtain over the window, Madam ?

PENELOPE. No. It is not the light. Apollo never favours us with a sight of his face nowadays—you know that as well as I do.

EURYNOME. Yes, Madam. But there always seems to me to be a glare in this room—perhaps it is the height—and the white walls—so bare . . . If only Madam would leave that work for an hour or two !

PENELOPE *(counting).* Forty-six . . . What did you say, Eurynome ? Leave this work ? That's all very well, but you know what it means—how all our lives are woven into this shroud of sea-blue wool. With every stitch I sew it seems to me a man or woman dies——

EURYNOME. But at night you bring them back to life——

PENELOPE. Sh ! You foolish girl ! How do you know who

THE RESCUE

may be listening? That girl, Callidice, for instance—I don't seem to have seen her about lately. I didn't like the look in her eye.

EURYNOME. I think her mother's ill, Madam. Euryclea gave her permission to go and look after her.

PENELOPE. Very possibly. So many people seem to be ill just now. I suppose it's this terrible weather.

EURYNOME. Partly, perhaps.

PENELOPE. Yet they do not waver in their loyalty to my husband—to Odysseus? They still believe that he will return? Tell me they do!

EURYNOME. No doubt, dear Madam, no doubt.

But, you know, the people never mention the lord Odysseus by name: it isn't safe. They say "he" and "his", and they make a sign to each other—ringing one eye—like this—with finger and thumb—because my lord was famous for his beautiful eyes.

PENELOPE. Was, Eurynome? Do you, then, doubt that he still lives?

EURYNOME. Oh, Madam! Pardon me—it was only a slip—

PENELOPE. Ah! I see you have lost hope. I suppose all of you have—if I only knew. You no longer tell me the truth.

(Music to background and hold.)

Ah! Eurynome! You have never known
The heavy weight of love,
The burden of it, like
A sick body.
On the day he left me—
Long,
So long ago—a day sunk deep in the furthest ebb
of memory—
Artemis sped an arrow to my breast,
And an obstinate bead of blood oozes from the
wound
Every day that I live.
The hours drop to the ground,
Like tired leaves,
And decay,
And sink into the earth and become part of it.

THE RESCUE

And I sit here and listen,
Listen for each tiny sound—the chirr of a cricket
astray on the broad step of the house, the
gurgle of the lamp when the oil is giving out,
the ticking of my needle, the footstep that
seems to approach in the distance of the house
. . . and then dies away into
The deepening silence of those who listen
No longer to the voice of their hearts,
The goddess too
Is silent ; but
I listen to that silence.
Eurynome ! Eurynome !
It is so hard to strive
Against the current—to
Scale the impossible.
In my darkest hours (you know them, child—
you who have watched with me)
I have seen him fighting the tide-race with his
hands ;
I have heard his stout ship crack in two upon the
rocks ;
I have seen his arms torn,
His face ascrawl with blood.
I have seen him bound with chains
In a dark and filthy place ;
Hungry and desperate,
His companions dying,
One by one.
In dreams I have heard him speak words of love—
And knew they were not for me . . .
One night, when I could not even
Dream, but lay with eyes
Wide open on the streaming darkness,
Suddenly I saw him
Bound to the mast of his ship, while
Voices of women,
Strangely beautiful,
Carssing,
Enticing,
Echoed across the rocking waves.



THE RESCUE

And in that moment I knew
That ingenious Odysseus was in the greatest danger
Of all that Poseidon the Earth-Shaker could devise.
Then I feared greatly for him ;
Yet always I could feel his heart beating
Hard against my palm :
His strong heart !
Eurynome ! I *know* that he lives, because
My lonely body can still feel
The iron clamp of his arms ;
And on my cheek the red fire of his eyes
Mantles from the distance of exile
Like a torch held high by the messenger in the
night !

*(Music up—a big climax of 30 seconds to 1 minute—
then slowly down and out behind speech.)*

EURYNOME. Forgive me, Madam. I follow your thoughts as
well as I can. But you should not weaken your-
self by such agitation—truly you should not.

PENELOPE. You are a good girl, Eurynome—but stop strok-
ing me : it exasperates me.

(Hubbub in the distance.) What is all that noise ?

EURYNOME. Only the usual thing, Madam. You have heard
it before, if you'll excuse my saying so.

PENELOPE. Ah, yes . . . of course. . . . But there seems
more of it now and the shouts are wilder and
angrier.

EURYNOME. They are getting impatient, Madam : that must
be it. Madam has kept them all at bay for
nearly four years. It is a long time for any
man to wait.

PENELOPE. Do I hear you taking their side, Eurynome ?

EURYNOME. Not exactly, Madam, but . . . well . . . there's
one or two of them . . . in Madam's place I
would not be able to hold out year after year . . .

PENELOPE *(sighs)*. Ah, child ! It has been easy—so easy—
for me to resist even the best of my suitors.
You see, Aphrodite of the rose and myrtle
cursed me at birth with a face that wakens
desire, and a heart that feels none—or almost
none. It is true that against Odysseus I had no

THE RESCUE

defence, from the very first. That is my claim to womanhood.

EURYNOME. *And* your son, Madam ! The lord Telemachus is grown so handsome—and like his father, too, they say.

PENELope. Like in some ways, not like enough in others. Telemachus was all minc whilst he was a child, now he belongs to himself and to his father.

(Hubbub again.)

Eurynome, go and find Euryclea. Ask her what new outrage I am to expect.

EURYNOME. Yes, Madam . . . *(Fade. Then, on dead side of mike.)* No, Sir, no ! You can't ! But Madam has not been warned ! You have no right !

EURYMACHUS *(outside room)*. I *am* the warning, girl ! I come by right of Danger. *(Inside room.)* Your servant, Madam !

PENELope. Eurymachus ! What is the meaning of this irruption ? My house already gives limitless shelter and hospitality to unbidden guests. Am I no longer to have the privacy even of my own chamber ?

(Music to background.)

Why do you look at me like that ? . . . Why do you fix your eyes on me

As if they held some new horror

Your lips dare not reveal ?

Why do you come before me like this, with the dark hair askew on your forehead, and

The sweat on your face,

And your long fingers a-tremble,

As they stretch out and grasp the sea-blue shroud
I weave for my lord ?

(Music up and out.)

EURYMACHUS. Penelope ! You will not believe me, but I come as your friend. Not to plead my own suit—I have long known that that was in vain—but to urge you to save yourself and Ithaca—from final disaster. Your guests are angry : their patience is at an end.

You must choose.

THE RESCUE

PENELOPE. Choose? Still that word! How often have I heard it? The shroud is still in your hand, Eurymachus. Why do you hold it up accusingly?

EURYMACHUS. No secret can be kept for ever, Penelope—except by the gods themselves. Yours is out at last.

EURYNOME (*screams*).

PENELOPE (*to herself*). That wretched girl Callidice! I knew it! (*Aloud*.) Eurynome! Why did you not warn me?

EURYNOME. Madam, I—

EURYMACHUS. What does it matter now?

Will nothing make you realise the position you are in? Come here . . . over here . . . Eurynome, pull aside that curtain. Now listen . . .

(*Hubbub. Banging and thumping. Angry voices disputing unintelligibly. Drunken shouts: "Broken, is it? Then bring another and hurry up about it." "Where is she?" "Bring her out!" "What! you won't?" Whip cracks and screams of women.*)

(*Hubbub fades as Eurymachus lets fall the curtain.*)

Do you understand now? They have been calling for more and more wine for hours past, to slake their dreadful thirst. And still the sweat pours from them, over the table—over the very meat, as they clutch it towards them. They are in a hideous mood.

PENELOPE. You call yourself my friend, yet you cannot prevent the mischief they do.

EURYMACHUS. No, I cannot—less now than ever. I bring you a hard choice, Penelope. Make up your mind to accept one or other of us. There are plenty to choose from, after all. The rest will abide your decision. Then this long and useless struggle will cease; Prosperity and Order will return to Ithaca. Refuse—hesitate a day longer—and final ruin will overtake your people. They have little left, as it is; then,

THE RESCUE

they will have nothing but death to call their own. Believe me, they will thank you for yielding.

PENELOPE. What ! Do you mean to tell me my people prefer those scoundrels to Odysseus, who treated one and all as friends ? How can their memories be so short ?

EURYMACHUS. It isn't their memories that are short, it's their stomachs.

PENELOPE. Ah ! . . . I see . . . Very well, then. (*Drawing herself up.*) Eurymachus, I will speak to them from the gallery that runs high under the roof-tree of the Great Hall. That doorway from which you pulled the curtain, leads to it. You will attend me, to insure some remnant of respect.

EURYMACHUS. As you will.

PENELOPE. I will tell them that they shall have their answer, within a certain number of days. And now, Eurynome, go to Euryclea and bid her find the lord Telemachus and ask him to wait upon me directly.

EURYNOME. Madam, I will. But surely Madam is not going to appear before all those men looking like that ! Why, your hair is all disarranged . . . your gown is not suitable . . . your necklace of amber . . .

PENELOPE (*laughs bitterly*). Your wits desert you, girl. Would you have me inflame them still further, by the arts of beauty ? No !

(*Music up and to background.*)

Rather will I make of my hair

A clotted mass like the stuffing of an old pillow ;

Scratch deep red gulleys down my cheeks, and

Smear my forehead with soot from the lamp ;

Pull my mouth to one side,

And huddled in filthy rags stand amid the torches' glare,

To show my suitors the woman they would take to wife !

(*Music up and down.*)

THE RESCUE

EURYNOME. Ah ! Madam ! I cannot bear to hear you speak so.

PENELOPE. Dry your eyes, child.
The worst has come for me—yet you see
I am not changed by it.
You have still to learn that the best
Is never as good as you hoped—
The worst
Never so bad.
Life will go on.

(Music up and out behind speech.)

EURYNOME. Oh, Madam ! but what will happen to you out there . . . those ruffians . . .

PENELOPE. Nothing, Eurynome—nothing at all.

EURYMACHUS. Your mistress will be quite safe with me.

PENELOPE. I hope so. Now, Sir, I am quite ready to face what you—and the gods—have in store for me.
Come !

(Hubbub again, as the door curtain is lifted.)

(With distance.) Eurynome ! Above all do not forget the message for my son.

(Cross-fade hubbub, rising to a roar. Then a sudden silence.)

1ST VOICE *(with strong echo)*. Penelope ! We will wait no longer !

2ND VOICE *(ditto)*. Choose !

3RD VOICE *(ditto)*. You can see us all. Which is it to be ?

1ST VOICE. Choose !

(The orchestra answers. In the softer passages one hears snatches of Penelope's speech and the resulting roar.)

PENELOPE. . . to the everlasting shame of the walls between which you stand . . . riotous extremes must have an end . . . acts of cruelty which will stain this land till the end of memory *(prolonged hubbub ; banging)* . . . sacrifice myself at long last . . . *(louder and clearer)* my son Telemachus.

(Cross-fade music — 30 seconds — and out behind speech.)

THE RESCUE

TELEMACHUS. Snapped again, curse it ! What's the good of you, Phemius, if you can't find me some better twine than this hopeless stuff ? Euryclea wouldn't use it to darn a hole in my shirt. Here ! Take hold of the haft a moment, will you ? No, the haft, I said, not the blade, stupid !

PHEMIUS. Poets, Telemachus, are not supposed to know one end of a spear from the other.

TELEMACHUS. What are they supposed to know, then ?

PHEMIUS. The heart's affections, and the strivings of men ;
The forms of Destiny ;
The beauty of faces, of limbs, of the folds in the chlamys you are wearing,
Of the waves in hair, and in water,
And in that standing corn over there beyond the wall.

The true end of courage
And endurance ; the love of
Home.

High-hearted resignation to what is and what
may come.

Above all,

The voices of the gods

When they pierce the breast as easily and pain-
lessly

As the wind your hair.

(Mutter of thunder.)

TELEMACHUS. A god spoke then, but I could not tell his meaning. *(Fearfully.)* It's getting darker. The sky is of burnished copper—like a shield.

Phemius, tell me (you are so wise) how may I
know a god, when one is near ?

(Thunder again, nearer.)

PHEMIUS. By his voice, Telemachus. When the gods are really near to you, they speak to you in words.

At other times you may hear or see, but never
touch them.

A poplar rustles in the breeze : it is Artemis.

A lazy wave tumbles forward on the shore :

THE RESCUE

Poseidon muttering in his sleep. You look into the heart of a blazing fire and there—suddenly—is the face of Apollo. Look again and the fair god is gone, leaving only a burning log.

Even as in the bubbles on the surface of a newly poured goblet of wine you may trace the features of Dionysus.

TELEMACHUS. Show me, Phemius ! Show me !

(Thunder again, nearer still.)

PHEMIUS. Look then at my lyre . . . I put it up there on that ledge of stone just now. Watch its outline against the copper shield of the sky.

See how it glows ! The face of Apollo . . .

(Harp to background.)

TELEMACHUS *(doubtfully)*. Yes . . . Yes . . .

PHEMIUS. Now look at the crack which runs down that wall, over there by the first olive tree. Slant-eyed Hermes regards you, Telemachus.

(A flute adds itself to the harp.)

Look there now—quick !—a quail aslant the evening !

Artemis is here !

(An oboe wheedles into the harmony.)

TELEMACHUS. Too late ! I was too late.

PHEMIUS. Look over there, then—at that ear of bearded wheat which weeps over the low wall : Demeter lamenting Persephone.

(Add solo violin. The four instruments play in quiet counter-point, then fade out behind dialogue.)

TELEMACHUS. Phemius, you have given me eyes !

PHEMIUS. Eyes, perhaps ; but it is ears you need most.

Not you only, but all men. Every man could be a poet, if only he would listen instead of talking. The eye deceives, the ear never.

TELEMACHUS. But I do listen——

PHEMIUS. Not with all your ears. Yet I tell you listening is the only true means to *know* a thing.

TELEMACHUS. But tell me, Phemius : among the gods you brought before my eyes just now, grey-eyed Athene was not one. Yet we know that she is the Ever-Near—as near as the air or water

THE RESCUE

that flow over the breast and limbs of a man.

PHEMIUS. At this moment she stands just behind your shoulder.

TELEMACHUS (*gasp*). Mentor ! (*Whisking round in a fury.*)
Phemius, you have been making game of me !
This is our old watchman, Mentor. Mentor !
Why don't you speak ?

PHEMIUS. Are you so sure it is Mentor ? Look again.

(*Pause.*)

TELEMACHUS. Ah ! The eyes ! The eyes ! The great grey eyes ! Speak to me, goddess, speak !

(*Pause.*)

Phemius ! What are you doing ?

PHEMIUS. Sh ! Keep still. Have no fear. I bind your eyes with my two hands . . . so . . . now listen. *Listen with all your heart !*

(*Fade up and hold a deep octave for cellos and basses, above which the Bach trumpet launches into a long cadenza, starting softly and working up to a long note, upon which Athene's voice is superimposed.*)

ATHENE (*sings*). Hark !

Telemachus mine own !

Hark to a voice

From out no human throat !

A sound the colour of blood

The shape of your thought, from the depths of the earth and the centre of air and the rim of the shadowy sea and the peak of the

Mountain all amethyst and rose.

(*The deep octave is held behind Phemius' speech.*)

PHEMIUS. Do you hear ? Do you hear now ?

TELEMACHUS. O mouth of gold ! Say on !

ATHENE (*sings*).

This is my word :

Keep it in your heart,

Telemachus mine own !

The time has come.

Take up the task :

Defend your house and your home.

(*Music up and down.*)

THE RESCUE

TELEMACHUS. I am under a strong spell. My limbs are heavy . . . bound as with ropes. Athene ! Saviour of Cities ! help me to obey your will.

ATHENE (*speaks*). I am your will, Telemachus. In obeying me you obey the commands of your own heart. Listen then !

(*Music up and down.*)

TELEMACHUS (*with difficulty, like one asleep*). I am to leave Ithaca immediately . . . and take ship . . . to Lacedaemon . . . where Pisistratus, son of Nestor, will guide me to . . . the court of Menelaus . . . and there . . . I shall receive news . . . of . . . of (*suddenly awake*) my father !

(*Music up and out.*)

Phemius ! let go your hands ! Did you hear that ? Did you hear that ? Let me go !

Goddess, I will obey. But all that will take time to prepare. I have no ship ready—

ATHENE. Yes, you have. The gods work swiftly. Due east of this place is a deep-watered creek well guarded by cliffs that seem unscalable. Mentor, whose form you see I have taken the liberty of borrowing, knows the only path down. There you will find a ship, its hold well stored with wine and oil and tough skins of barley meal, sufficient for a voyage.

TELEMACHUS. What about men ?

ATHENE. Even as the question left your lips, the last of the crew—he was hesitating—yielded to the others' persuasion and slipped down the path to the shore.

Now go. Lose no time. I go myself to entreat high Zeus to loose the storm at last and unleash the west wind to bear you safely across the straits. (*Fade.*)

TELEMACHUS. Let go your hands, Phemius ! Look ! the owl !

MENTOR. We are wasting precious time, young sir.

TELEMACHUS. Mentor ! Is it really you, after all ?

THE RESCUE

PHEMIUS (*laughing*). The goddess has flown, Telemachus, restoring to our friend the hospitality of his own body.

(*Thunder prolonged.*)

MENTOR. Quick ! Take your spear and follow me.

TELEMACHUS. It's so dark, I can't see. Phemius, I commend my mother to your care. Tell her—whatever you think fit.

PHEMIUS. I will. (*Fade.*)

MENTOR. Hurry ! Hurry ! Give me your hand . . . here . . . through the scrub and down to the left.

(*Fade up excited music—peak for 1 minute then fade down behind crowd murmur.*)

VOICES

(MALE). It's coming at last.

(FEMALE). Phemius said so . . . you remember ?

(FEMALE). Wait for the rain, he said.

(MALE). It was after the eagles flew over.

(FEMALE). Look at that sky !

(MALE). It'll ruin the crops.

(MALE). Bah ! They're ruined anyway.

(MALE). What we want's a bit o' wind.

(FEMALE). We'll get that all right !

(MALE). Thunder's coming again. Look out !

(*Loud crack of thunder.*)

(*Cross-fade music up and down behind dialogue.*)

PHEMIUS (*low tense voice.*) . . . and by now he should be well out to sea. It was the goddess's command, Penelope (forgive me : familiarity is the prerogative of poets). It was now or never.

PENELOPE (*in the last stages of nervous exhaustion*). Never a word, Phemius ! Never a single word to me, his mother . . . leaves me here alone . . . among all these . . .

(*Music up and out—a single phrase.*)

PHEMIUS. What was that thought I saw cross your eyes like an evil shadow ?

PENELOPE. The thought of death.

PHEMIUS. Then you must look for something that will bring it—and look far, I think, for there is nothing

THE RESCUE

and no one here who would accord you anything but life and yet more life.

PENELOPE. And if I think death what they call life ?

PHEMIUS. The loss will not be theirs.

(Fade up music and hurried footsteps approaching.)

PENELOPE. Euryclea ! What is the matter now ? Your face is grey with fear. Tell me instantly !

EURYCLEA *(out of breath)*. Madam ! It is discovered. They know. . . .

(Thunder.)

PENELOPE. Know what ?

EURYCLEA. That Telemachus is gone. Their rage is greater than ever.

PENELOPE *(moans)*.

PHEMIUS. How do you know this, old woman ?

EURYCLEA. Medon, the usher, overheard them plotting.

PENELOPE. What were they plotting ? What should it matter to them whether my son goes or stays ?

EURYCLEA. I don't know. I understand nothing of it all—only what I drag my old limbs here to warn you of.

PENELOPE. Well ?

EURYCLEA. They are resolved on his death.

(Music up and down behind dialogue.)

PENELOPE. What shall I do ? Oh, what shall I do ? Athene ! Clear-eyed one ! Speak to me ! Give me some comfort—some assurance that my son at least will not meet with this unjust end.

(Deafening peal of thunder. Then screech of rain.)

PHEMIUS. Your prayer is answered, Penelope. The great cloud has broken at last, and from its cave the west wind will break loose to fill Telemachus' sail.

(Storm. Music up.)

ATHENE *(sings)*.

Hermes ! Hermes !

Stir the air !

Sweep along the rain

Over the sounding sea !

Hear Athene's word !

(Music up and down.)

THE RESCUE

HERMES (*sings*).

I hear ! I come !

(*Music up and down.*)

West wind, be my voice !

Wing my head !

Cleave to me !

(*Music up, then down to background.*)

PHEMIUS (*very close to mike ; in highest excitement*).

Do you hear, Penelope ? Do you hear ?

Hermes is come . . . the wind—

PENELOPE. And my son will be safe out of their reach.

(*Music up and down.*)

PHEMIUS, come to the window. Look out with me
into the cave of the night . . . down there—

PHEMIUS. In the town . . . torches—

PENELOPE. See how they flare and steam in the rain—

PHEMIUS. Flockmeal they come, darting to and fro like
fireflies between the waving fingers of the
cypress trees.

PENELOPE. So many ! So many ! (*With sudden fear.*)

What is happening down there, PHEMIUS ?

PHEMIUS. Hark !

(*Irus' rattle whirrs in the distance.*)

Irus again !

PENELOPE. Their spy—

PHEMIUS. Up to some dirty trick—

PENELOPE. PHEMIUS ! I cannot stay here . . . I must find . . .
I must know . . . (*Fade.*)

(*Music up and down.*)

PHEMIUS (*to himself*). Things are happening at last.

The rain has come, and the wind. But there is
still something else—something that I feel—as
it were the pulse of my blood or the voice of
a god. Above the wind and the rain I can hear
a new sound—a music remembered from long,
long ago. . . . Ah ! What is this joy that fills
my heart so that it cries out with pain un-
speakable ! Happiness unspeakable ! I dare
not—I dare not give voice to my hope. Yet
in my heart I know it is more than hope !

(*Music up. Then down behind murmur of voices.*)

THE RESCUE

EURYMACHUS (*whispering to himself, close to mike*).

If only I could be sure that "he" would not return—that he was certainly dead! If only I knew! She said to me: "My choice is locked in his mouth, Eurymachus. It is his secret now, not mine. You must get it from *him*."

And then she laughed and cried at once, and rocked herself backwards and forwards. "He's safe from you all," she cried. (*Pause.*) Safe? . . . Yes, until he comes back . . .

But if it should not be Telemachus, but he whose name I dare not speak even to myself. Ah! if only I knew!

(*Music up and down to background.*)

Ares! First of the gods in

Pride!

Enclose my heart in fire,

So it attain the harshness of

Adamant.

Obscure the day-beam of Apollo,

Steal his ray and

Turn it to darkness of the winter sea.

The exile of hostile nearness

Tortures me: collect the power

Of my griefs to grind the edge of your battle-axe

Against memory's subtle music.

I am alone, alone!

Look upon it! Give to me

Release of certainty, in vision of

Odysseus dead!

Then shall Penelope be mine

And Ithaca rejoice again in the Peace of Order.

(*Music up.*)

HERMES (*sings*).

He lives!

He is here!

Odysseus comes ashore in sleep!

ATHENE (*sings*).

Hermes! Arch-reiver!

Betray not me!

THE RESCUE

Hush your voice !
Ithaca claims her own.

HERMES. I go.

*(Music, long peak. Fade down wind to silence,
leaving a solo flute playing a quiet tune (30 seconds).)*

COXSWAIN. Careful now . . . gently . . . remember the
goddess's command : He is not to waken till
we have placed him in safety.

1ST SAILOR. The cave of the Naiads . . . I suppose this is it ?

2ND SAILOR. Poof ! Feels like a dead weight to me !

3rd SAILOR. Aye ! He's a big man.

1ST SAILOR. What's that green light down there ?

(Distant sound of four Naiads singing.)

COXSWAIN. We are disturbing the privacy of the ladies who
own this cave. You needn't carry him any
farther ; here's a ledge in the rock. Lay him
on it . . . no, the other way . . . with his
face to the opening, so that the dawn may
wake him, if the goddess wills.

(Song of Naiads out.)

2ND SAILOR. That right ?

COXSWAIN. Yes, but don't leave his head hanging over the
edge like that. Here ! Put this under it. Now
get going ! We've no time to waste.

(Music up—a nocturne—and down to background.)

Athene ! Grey-eyed Preserver !

Bear witness that we, mariners of Phaeacia,
Have exactly carried out your command,
And that we have truly and with loving care
Brought the godlike Odysseus to his home at last.
Great Zeus has spent his strength
And yields to Artemis : the wide-winged moon
Swings clear of the cloud-wrack,
Laying on the sea a glittering spear
To point our voyage home.

1ST SAILOR. Goddess of the silver-dusky Night,
And you, Goddess of the waiting Dawn,
Speed our oars !

2ND SAILOR. And to you we bid farewell,
Noble Odysseus ;
With regret for your lively tongue and its tales.



THE RESCUE

3RD SAILOR. We shall miss your company.

COXSWAIN. Farewell !

SAILORS. Farewell ! Farewell !

*(Cross-fade into music, full up—30 seconds. Then add
Athenes's trumpet and take orchestra to background.)*

ATHENE *(sings)*.

Farewell ! Your task is done.

Now begins the final contest.

Awake, Odysseus,

From your deepest

And longest sleep !

Part your eyelids !

Learn once more

The face of home !

(Music up, then gradually out. Silence. Then :)

ODYSSEUS *(The clear vibrant voice of a man of forty-five—
speaking very quietly—wonderingly—feeling his
way to consciousness.)*

That mouth . . . that loved mouth . . . If I
open my eyes, I shall see it no more. A voice
said : Part your eyelids ! *(Sighs.)* So soon
again ? Another struggle ! The battle with a
god is more full of weariness than were the
longest and bitterest moments of the war. I
never doubted my strength then. *(Sighs again.)*
Ah well ! My eyes have taken command after
all. *(Pause.)* Light . . . points of light hang
in the dusky air, drawing a shape . . . two
shapes . . . Arcturus . . . Orion . . . a frag-
ment of earliest dawn—small, so small—bitten
out by black teeth of rock. But that is far
away. Around me darkness impenetrable as
sleep—deeper than just now the night of my
eyelids. *(Pause.)* Something is moving down
there in the night wind. Is it the hair of a pine
bough and its cone nodding against the belted
rider in the sky ? I hear the sea, but far off and
quiet . . . so quiet . . . This cavern must be
some way from the shore. *(Pause.)* The light
grows. I begin to see. *(More awake.)* What
shore will this be ? And what is this put to

THE RESCUE

pillow my head? A tall cap of red-brown fleece, sewn with a fringe of gold. (*Fully awake.*) Ah! I remember now. It's all coming back . . . the Phaeacian coxswain . . . the ship . . . noble Menelaus' gift . . .

(*Trumpet cadenza up and out.*)

Is that a figure moving, down there in the shadow of the rock . . . a grey mantle . . . (*Shouting.*) Who's there? Come forward! I am not unarmed——

ATHENE (*speaking*). But I am. So put up your sword. See! I have nothing but this crook with which to harm you.

ODYSSEUS. Ah . . . Let me look closer at you. A shepherd, eh?

ATHENE. If you like.

ODYSSEUS. Your voice is sweet—fair as your beardless cheek, which I begin to see. The light grows fast. The stars are gone.

ATHENE. I am deserving of trust.

ODYSSEUS. Trust! You little know how that word sounds in my ears. Who am I that I should trust a stranger? I who have suffered a hundred betrayals—torment unspeakable—and have found a god's immitigable vengeance in the eyes and hands of my fellow-men.

ATHENE. Not always. Not now. The sight of the fields and vineyards of home will restore you memories that are not at all bitter.

ODYSSEUS. Home? Who speaks to me of home?

(*Solo violin to background.*)

ATHENE. Down there, swept by Apollo's golden curls, clear-shining Ithaca awaits your greeting, long-suffering Odysseus.

(*Violin up and out.*)

ODYSSEUS. Ithaca? Clear-shining?

Shepherd! How do you know my name?

ATHENE. How should I not know it—I who am the Ever-Near?

ODYSSEUS. The Ever-Near? Only Athene has the right to that title.

THE RESCUE

ATHENE. Well . . .

(Pause.)

ODYSSEUS. You spoke truly when you said I had suffered long . . . too long and too much ! Once I could have trusted my heart to tell me when a god was at hand, but now . . .

ATHENE. I will renew your heart, Odysseus. Look behind you—down into the cave—and tell me what you see.

ODYSSEUS. I see four shapes of women cradled in their flowing hair. Their outlines waver dimly, as if depth after depth of green water stretched between me and them.

ATHENE. They are the Naiads.

ODYSSEUS. The Naiads ? I seem to remember something . . . But they are very silent. Here am I, a large man, standing in their cave, staring at them. Why don't they say something ? I would like to hear them sing.

ATHENE. No doubt you will, presently. Just now they have a more important service to render you.

ODYSSEUS. A more important—

ATHENE. Yes. They are the bridge which spans the gulf of eighteen years. They are the final step of your long, long journey.

ODYSSEUS. But how—?

ATHENE. The Naiads are reflections. Whatever gesture you make towards them, they will make the same towards you. Stretch out your hand.

(Pause.)

ODYSSEUS. But I cannot grasp the fingers I see glimmering white in the distance.

ATHENE. Can you grasp water with the hand that goes down to meet it ?

ODYSSEUS. How then shall I—?

ATHENE. Stretch a little further. She will let you touch the tip of her fingers with your own. In that moment you will rejoin yourself. Further . . . a little further . . .

(Pause. Then full orchestra up, fortissimo — 30 seconds—and down to background.)

THE RESCUE

ODYSSEUS. Athene ! Grey-eyed Preserver !
Shining One !
Saviour of Cities !
Wielder of the Unconquerable Spear !
My forehead to your knee !
Forgive ! Forgive !

(Music up and out.)

ATHENE. Odysseus ! In the farthest reaches
Of your exile, when
Death hemmed you in a different cave,
Under the moon-white eye
Of ruthless Cyclops—even in that extremity
You did not fail to recognise my voice.

ODYSSEUS. Yet now——

ATHENE. Men are sometimes farthest from themselves in
their own homes. Go out into the morning.
You will soon see.

(Music up and down.)

ODYSSEUS *(open-air effect)*.

That curve of shore . . . that hill . . . the grove
of cork trees I planted with my own hands . . .
Ah ! The very air seems my own !
Swift-flying dawn has left her veil
Tangled in the olive groves that rise
Terrace after remembered terrace,
Curling up and up the spiral hill ;
Unnumbered silver heads in the sparkling sky.
Ithaca, my own ! How small ! How tender !
How unprotected you look, after
The proud-bastioned shores and rugged lands
Among which the gods have sent the patient
shuttle of my body,
To and fro,
Year after weary year !
Nevertheless in this supreme moment
You are less dear to me than
The promise of a face,
A form, a hand,
Embroidered all on my sleep
By the tapering finger of absence :
Penelope . . .

THE RESCUE

Ah ! how many times have I uttered that name
to the obdurate sky, the sounding sea, to the
pillow, empty at my side, to
Eyes that held not even your image, but gazed
in sullen indifference
On Odysseus bewailing his ever-threatened love !
(*Music up—10 seconds—then down.*)

Not unused to the fortunes of battle,
I yet dare not face this final fear.

(*Music up and quickly out.*)

ATHENE. What fear is that ?

ODYSSEUS. The fear that in her heart she is no longer my own.

ATHENE. Odysseus, I would not have it said in future that
my favourite among living men was wrongly
called magnanimous.

ODYSSEUS. Women are easily persuaded, when they doubt.
My absence has been long.

ATHENE. You judge your wife by the worst possible
standard—that of the women you have since
known. Ah, how like a man, to expect every
woman to love you—and then despise them
for doing so ! This is what comes of living
seven years with that absurd Calypso—with
her dyed hair and her affectations.

ODYSSEUS. Such a taunt comes ill from the gods who held
me captive in that island.—Poor Calypso !
She was a good-natured woman . . . but her
appearance and manner were not the worst
thing about her. . . .

ATHENE. What was, then ?

ODYSSEUS. Her singing. So much too loud for the confined
space in which we lived ! I can stand a great
deal, as you know——

ATHENE. A true word, Odysseus . . . and I am afraid you
have still one more ordeal to bear——

ODYSSEUS. I will undergo it. Only tell me what it is to be,
Shining One. Uncover its face now.

ATHENE. It is not what you think.

ODYSSEUS. Then give me the right thought——

ATHENE. I cannot do that. Men's thoughts are their own :
only their actions are in our hands.

THE RESCUE

ODYSSEUS. You torment me !

ATHENE. Listen, then—and beware lest your strong heart burst with anger. Penelope's love for you has grown with the pressure put upon her to lay it aside : that is the measure of her character. She has lost nothing finally, save what you too have lost : youth and trust.

ODYSSEUS. That word again ! Whom should she trust but me ?

ATHENE. You forget myself—but let that pass. Your wife trusted your neighbours, whom she thought friends. They pretended to be so, encroached on your land ; gradually—little by very little—they tightened their hold on Ithaca and on its men and women and children.

ODYSSEUS. And on my wife.

ATHENE. She was the final prize—the symbol of authority. Marriage to her would mean ultimate possession of Ithaca. More, it would mean that these arrogant men had defeated the gods themselves. The submission of Penelope would darken Olympus and shame high Zeus himself. The invaders know this. For a year and more they have laid siege to your wife's heart, outbidding each other in the extravagance of their persuasions.

ODYSSEUS. And still——

ATHENE. And still she withstands, bearing as she does your image ever in her heart——

(Pause.)

ODYSSEUS. I am ashamed . . . bewildered . . . torn . . .
torn . . . TORN !

ATHENE. Let the image of disaster sink deep into your spirit and there kindle the flame of a just revenge.

ODYSSEUS. Is my name then quite forgotten ?
Has not one single man of all remained true ?
Agelaus ? Eumaeus ?

ATHENE. Eumaeus is as the strongest oak in all Achaea.
Agelaus is but lately gone over to the invaders.
He and Peisander——

THE RESCUE

ODYSSEUS. Forgive me, All-Wise ! Remit the names : I cannot bear to hear them. Yet I think I know

(Music to background.)

and at this moment I can see, lit by the flame you have kindled, the death each one will die at my hands.

(Music up and down.)

Tell me one thing more. Where are they to be found, these——

(Music up and out.)

ATHENE. *In your own house.*

(Music up and out—7 seconds.)

Wait ! Some things yet remain to do. The occasion is not yet ripe.

ODYSSEUS. But if I delay any longer——

ATHENE. You will assure the deaths you seek. Remember that it is for your prudence—as well as for your courage—that I am your friend. Remember, too, that the gods have no power over Death. We can postpone it—but not for ever. So take comfort.

ODYSSEUS. How long must I wait ? The gods are hard indeed. Eight years is little to those who enjoy immortality ; but for us . . .

ATHENE. You will not await my signal for very long. Only until your son returns.

ODYSSEUS. Telemachus ! He is gone ? Where ? Has he betrayed me too ?

ATHENE. He is gone to seek news of you.

ODYSSEUS. What a waste of time and money ! He had far better have stayed at home and looked after his mother.

ATHENE. You are wrong. The experience will be good for him.

ODYSSEUS. Ah ? If it was your will, All-Wise. But where am I to await your signal ?

ATHENE. With Eumæus, your oldest friend. You will not have forgotten where to find him.

(Music to background.)

THE RESCUE

ODYSSEUS. The farm in the hills, beside the fountain of Arethusa. (*Musingly.*) Eumaeus . . . It will be good to see him again.

(*Music up and out.*)

ATHENE. But not that he—or anyone else—should recognise you at once.

ODYSSEUS (*laughs*). I'm a good hand at disguise. In the war we used to get ourselves up as Trojans and creep into the city at night. We accounted for quite a lot of the enemy that way.

ATHENE. My disguise will be more effective.

(*Music up and out.*)

ODYSSEUS. Ah ! What are these wrinkles in my cheeks ? These knotted hands ?

(*Music up and out.*)

Aie ! My right leg goes stiff. I am bent nearly double . . . Ah ! Merciless One ! What is happening to me ?

(*Music up and out.*)

ATHENE (*laughs*). The ill is not irreparable. For a little time you will look like an old man, but you will not feel like one.

ODYSSEUS (*different voice—older*). Old men seldom do, I believe. Even in these few moments I notice a lightness in my head . . . a certain lack of seriousness I've often noticed about old people.

ATHENE. That is also one of my gifts.

ODYSSEUS. I am duly grateful. By the way, I thought you said the Naiads were going to sing. I should have liked to hear their voices just once—

ATHENE. Instead you will hear another.

(*Music to background.*)

The voice of smooth-cheeked Apollo beckons you from the spring in the mountains.

APOLLO (*sings*).

Fare forth !

To the shining hill,

Above the olive terraces,

Fare forth !

ATHENE. Here is my crook to help you walk. You may find it difficult at first.

THE RESCUE

APOLLO (*sings*).

No ill betide

Him who o'er the flowering plain

'Twixt lotus and the starred marsh-marigold

Threads a patient foot.

ODYSSEUS. It'll be slow going with a leg like this.

To think that I, the unbeloved of Death, should
survive extreme perils to be entangled by the
brambles on my own land !

ATHENE. Only those who run away get caught by thorns.

ODYSSEUS. O quick of wit ! I could not run now, if the
Cyclops were pursuing me !

ATHENE. Believe in yourself and all will be well. Such is
my word : keep it in your heart. (*Fade.*)

ODYSSEUS. I will try.

APOLLO (*sings*).

Bide the time !

Odysseus !

Bide the time !

(*Cross-fade orchestra, very quiet, to end.*)

END OF PART I

PART TWO

(Music up—an Ambade (1 minute)—then to background.)

ATHENE *(speaks).*

I, Athene, rise to the edge of night and discover
Dim in the rose-pale dawn the mountain top
where sparkles

Arethusa's spring, the secret emerald : wet moss
Pierced by broken branches of long-ago fallen
pine-bole.

Secret too and sacred the oak-grove, folding its
branches

Under the windy summit reared like an arrogant
ship's prow :

Crag of the Raven clawed by a dying tree-root ;
and higher

Still, swept by a wet sleeve, the tangled cloud-
scape of autumn

Shutters the brooding face of Zeus, the mysteri-
ous father.

(Music up and down to a single bass octave and hold.)

This is the home of the swincherd, Eumaeus,
stalwart in friendship. Here

Gold-eyed, swarthy Odysseus waits for my spear
to be lowered.

Seated alone by the house-wall, plaiting a skein
of garlic,

Gaze on the path to the city, whence the time-
proved Eumaeus,

Ever returning with heavy heart and tidings-less
lips and

Eyes—the god-withered hero counts the pulse of
his heart, still

Strong for the coming ordeal. Yet, as I watch
his dextrous

THE RESCUE

Hands at this silly task, his eyes never leaving the
spot where the
Path turns down out of sight into valleys smeared
by the death mark,
Brooding, nursing the hunger fever, the obdurate
shadow :

This when I see, the sorrow of mortal Odysseus,
I am remorseful almost and fall to silence,
heeding his spirit.

*(Music up, then dwindles to a flute solo. Hold this
behind speech.)*

ODYSSEUS. Hard,
Hard and dry as these stalks in my hand
Are the memories that throng me in this place.
Disconsolate,
Inconsolable,
I strive and clamber in the new-found depths of
my heart,
Grown transparent as water in which the notes
have sunk with unaccustomed stillness.
(Music up and down—as at opening of Part I.)
Ah ! Ithaca ! Ithaca, my own ! You are not,
You are not as I saw you in
That first enchanted dawn ; home
Is a word with many meanings : I know only one.
Home
Is woman and child,
Is the broad-stepped house, the ship-crowded
harbour, the stabled horse,
The light shining above the door.
Home is also the bitter taste of acorns in the mouth,
The uneasy dream with open eyes,
The lament that falls silent as the stranger passes
the door—
The empty heart, the scene
That is the same, yet different.
This is the torture hour, the torture
Of waiting for a sign that does not come :
(Athene's trumpet very faint and muted.)
For the voice that will command me to put off
This sickness of loathsome disguise, to uncrease

THE RESCUE

This deep fold in the garment of my life,
And re-sharpen the neglected arrows of just
revenge.

(Music up, and down to muted trumpet solo.)

ATHENE. I would reveal myself
For consolation, yet will remain
Unseen. The Hour is so near . . .
Eumaeus
Shall unwind my present thread. For see !
He comes now loping tall between the oak trees,
The fire of Apollo's eyes
Dappling his rugged face and breast ; behind him
In the wind of his going
Flies his wine-red mantle ;
At his heels a shaggy dog
Shakes his yellow pelt in the dew-bright air.

(Music up and cross-fade.)

EUMAEUS *(talking savagely to himself: a deep rough voice)*.
Faces . . . faces . . . faces . . . stamped on my
eyeballs so I can see nothing else, wherever I
look. Faces that breed and multiply from each
other : bubbling spawn of rot and misery !

ODYSSEUS *(with distance)*. Hey ! Hey ! Eumaeus !

EUMAEUS *(still to himself)*. One woman alone . . . *(Seeing Odysseus.)* Euh ! . . . Another face ! The
old fellow's up early.

ODYSSEUS *(close)*. What's that you were saying, Eumaeus ?
I saw your lips move, throwing out savage
words like black stones into the sunlight.

EUMAEUS. My thoughts are my own. Those were not words
for your hearing. What's that you've got in
your hand ?

ODYSSEUS *(confused)*. I—it's—I was plaiting your garlic into
skeins. It dries better like that. Just something
to do . . .

EUMAEUS. *Something to do* . . . By all the gods ! . . .

ODYSSEUS. My friend, your eyes are those of a blind man, or
one who has looked on some unbearable sight.

EUMAEUS. They are. They have.

ODYSSEUS. Tell your story, then. All night I lay awake,
wondering what dawn would bring.



THE RESCUE

- EUMAEUS (*sombrely*). What is it to you—a man of Crete ?
Why should you care what becomes of us all ?
Our loyalty concerns only ourselves.
- ODYSSEUS. I too am loyal—to what made me happy when I
was young. Besides, to a wanderer every
land is a home—compels some degree of inter-
est—in this case, Eumaeus, a high degree.
- EUMAEUS (*grunts*). Interest won't help. Things are bad.
- ODYSSEUS. How——?
- EUMAEUS. I said bad—*bad*—BAD !
- ODYSSEUS. I think I guess the chief cause of your great
trouble of spirit : I can even see her face in
your eyes.
- EUMAEUS. How can that be ? You have never seen her.
- ODYSSEUS. Penelope ! (*Recollecting himself.*) Ah no, of
course . . . But the bad news, did it come
from her ? Tell me her words, Eumaeus—
her very words.
- EUMAEUS. She had none. What words there were were my
own : prayers . . . entreaties . . . all useless !
Time was when she would listen to me.
- ODYSSEUS. But then——
- EUMAEUS. Then the great white walls of her chamber sent
my own words back to me, like light from the
sea ; and silence fell between us—as when the
oarsmen lift their oars out of the water and the
boat drifts.
- ODYSSEUS. To drift for long means to run on the rocks, if
you're navigating the straits. I know that.
Could your desperate heart find no words to
stir an answer ?
- EUMAEUS. In the end I asked her what had happened to close
her ears to me.
- ODYSSEUS. And——
- EUMAEUS. It is my great grief, she said. That's what cut
me off from you, my old and trusted friend.
Yes, she called me that, and looked so sadly,
as if she feared I would not believe what she
said—I, Eumaeus ! She said : It is despair,
not indifference, which makes silence around
me.

THE RESCUE

ODYSSEUS. Despair ! She used that word ?

EUMAEUS. Aye ! And I was going to follow up my advantage and reproach her for it, when a sunbeam fell through the window on to her face, and I looked again and followed the finger of Apollo drawing a double image of death—the death of my old friend her husband, my lord and master, Odysseus—and of his son, Telemachus.

Old man, your eyes glitter strangely.

ODYSSEUS (*very softly*). That too is the finger of Apollo. (*Louder.*) My friend, I think you have let another despair overload your heart and becloud your eye. The gods often make our troubles seem at their worst just before they intend to dissolve them entirely.

Telemachus—

EUMAEUS. Stranger, you speak of what you do not know. Telemachus should have returned by now. Four days and nights I have listened for that sound.

ODYSSEUS. What sound ?

EUMAEUS. The signal we arranged between us : the hoot of an owl. You make it by blowing into your closed hands.

(*Music—owl-hoot—very distant.*)

What was that ?

ODYSSEUS (*chuckles*). The noise you described. But you see I did not make it.

(*Owl-hoot again—nearer.*)

EUMAEUS. Where does it come from, then ?

ODYSSEUS. Look behind you, Eumaeus—up over the fallen pine beyond the spring.

EUMAEUS (*cries*). Ah !

(*Music up, then down to background and hold.*)

ODYSSEUS. The Raven's Crag is crested with another kind of bird. I see the raised arms, the tall slim body of a youth flung forward on the breast of the air !

EUMAEUS (*receding*). Telemachus ! Hoi !

(*Music up and down.*)

THE RESCUE

ODYSSEUS. Outlined on the streaming light
Telemachus,
My son Telemachus !
Memory ! Uncover your eyes and
Look into mine,
Deep ! deep ! Possess me entirely
For this brief instant, until
My heart of deceit shadow our meeting with its
folded wings.

(Music up and out behind speech.)

How grave his young face is ! His mother's
seriousness . . . Ah yes ! That is Penelope's
face, not mine, coming to meet me. Those
round, sea-blue eyes ; that thin nose—too
delicate for a man really. But his mouth is
mine, and it is set hard. Yes ! My son too
has had a taste of life : I see the signs—signs I
used to read on the watching faces of my old
companions, under Trojan dawns.

(Cross-fade Telemachus and Eumaeus talking very fast.)

TELEMACHUS *(approaching)*. . . No, Eumaeus, no—no danger
from that quarter.

EUMAEUS. How can you be sure they haven't spotted the
ship ?

TELEMACHUS. I can't. They probably have by now—but it
just doesn't matter, don't you see ? It's too late
for them to do anything : I'm here.

EUMAEUS. And the others ?

TELEMACHUS. The others ? It is I those swine were after,
Eumaeus—not a handful of sailors from the
port. You know where they put me ashore :
the one place in the whole island the gang will
never have thought of watching. My men have
got their orders. By now the ship will be safe
in harbour and they'll just have melted away.

EUMAEUS. You take things easy, don't you ?

TELEMACHUS. Oh ! The goddess will see they get safely to
their homes, just as she saw to—well, to every-
thing else. I was the one—the only one—
Antinous and his gang were out to get . . .
and they've missed their man.

THE RESCUE

EUMAEUS. Do not tempt the gods, Telemachus. Antinous and his friends may have better luck next time. But here at least you are safe. Come into the house. You must be hungry.

TELEMACHUS. Not in the least. I——

(Gesture of music up and out.)

ODYSSEUS. Greetings, young man ! From one traveller to another.

TELEMACHUS. Who is this, Eumaeus ? Whose is this bearded face that keeps in the shadows even for a greeting ?

ODYSSEUS. I am——

EUMAEUS. A man of Crete, rich by his own account, but afflicted with a love of wandering. I know no more. He stays here because he likes it.

TELEMACHUS. I too have wandered, old man, but have no love of it.

ODYSSEUS. To the old and homeless wandering is always natural, and sometimes unavoidable. But for one so young as yourself, however much in love with adventure, I would expect a father's anxious love——

TELEMACHUS. I have never had a father, nor known that love.

(Pause.)

ODYSSEUS. Then forgive my words : they were lightly spoken.

TELEMACHUS. And so they need no pardon. Whatsoever the gods send me, I have borne and will bear. Eumaeus ! My mother——

EUMAEUS. You read my thought. If you'd had eyes for it, you might have seen her despair of your return reflected in my face, when my eyes first lit on you.

TELEMACHUS. She takes me for a helpless fool !

EUMAEUS. By the gods, Telemachus ! she had a better reason than that for being anxious.

ODYSSEUS *(calmly)*. You waste words.

TELEMACHUS. The Cretan is right. Eumaeus, I think I must not appear at the palace unannounced. My mother hates surprises.

ODYSSEUS *(laughs shortly)*.

THE RESCUE

TELEMACHUS. Why do you laugh ?

ODYSSEUS. I laugh not at you, boy, but at my own thoughts.

EUMAEUS. Who's wasting words now ? I go, Telemachus,
I go ! This day shall see me at the palace again,
and the store of secret joy in my face will
prepare the way, first for my news, then for
yourself.

TELEMACHUS. I will follow. Your guest shall keep me company
meanwhile.

EUMAEUS. He'll talk your head off, if you let him. Well—
the gods keep you till we meet ! (*Fade.*)

TELEMACHUS. The gods keep you !

ODYSSEUS. As one traveller to another, young man, would
you say that our friend Eumaeus was quicker
to anger than most men one meets ?

TELEMACHUS (*laughs*). Not anger. He's irritated, that's all.
It comes of the solitary life he leads. My
mother's always on at him about marrying.
She's very fond of him . . . takes a maternal
interest . . . that sort of thing . . .

ODYSSEUS. Quite ! But he doesn't seem to me the marrying
sort.

TELEMACHUS. No, I expect not. Anyway he's getting old.

ODYSSEUS. Our tempers don't improve with age, it's true.
Still, I wouldn't describe Eumaeus as old.

TELEMACHUS. Not as old as you, of course. (*Pause.*) Why do
you look at me like that ?

ODYSSEUS. Like what ?

TELEMACHUS. I don't know . . . The glitter of your eyes
troubles me.

ODYSSEUS. It must be the sun : his beams are getting strong.

TELEMACHUS. No—it's as if I were trying to recall something.
I wish I knew . . .

ODYSSEUS. Try harder . . . as hard as you can . . .

TELEMACHUS. Why ? When you talk like that you remind me
of Phemius.

ODYSSEUS. Phemius ?

TELEMACHUS. He's our local poet—you won't have heard of
him. A good chap too—taught me a lot about
life.

ODYSSEUS. Your life is your own.

THE RESCUE

TELEMACHUS. Oh no, it isn't ! It's my father's, until I find him. After that—and for the rest of my days—it will belong to this island.

ODYSSEUS. You are giving up all your life to a father you cannot even remember ?

TELEMACHUS. Oh yes ! Memory isn't easy : it has to be learnt.

ODYSSEUS. Yes. In me you see a man all compounded of memories . . . as your father too must be.

(Pause.)

TELEMACHUS. What is your name ?

ODYSSEUS. Your friend Phemius must have told you not to ask that sort of question.

TELEMACHUS. I daresay he did—and I forgot it. I told you memory wasn't easy. But if I've forgotten my father, I do know exactly what he looked like.

ODYSSEUS. Your mother described him to you ?

TELEMACHUS. Better than that. On the day he left to fight in the war, he and my mother were standing outside our home, by the wall—as it might be this one here. He must have stood just as you are standing now. My mother had me in her arms (I was a baby then, of course) and was saying a last good-bye to him. She was crying. Then suddenly the sun came out from behind a cloud and slanted down—it was the afternoon—casting the shadow of Odysseus' head on the wall . . . there ! just as it is now casting yours on this wall here—but in profile.

ODYSSEUS. Like this ?

TELEMACHUS. Yes, like that. And when she saw it, a thought came to my mother in the midst of her great grief. She gave me to my nurse, Euryclea, to hold, and took a pin from her hair. Then she told my father to keep still where he stood, and scratched the outline of his head and shoulders and one of his hands on the surface of the wall, so that the grey stone showed through the whitening where she had scratched it. Since I grew to manhood hardly a day has passed without my going to that spot to gaze on my father's face—the unusual set of



THE RESCUE

his head, the beard that points straight down instead of outwards, the high shoulders—and that short stubby hand, with the long thumb, curving outwards : the hand of crafty Odysseus . . .

(Murmuring music to background.)

How loud the spring sounds, all of a sudden !

(Music up and down.)

ODYSSEUS. It might almost be a voice—a goddess's voice.

TELEMACHUS. And everything else so quiet . . . the stillness of high noon . . . Your face and hand look as if they were drawn on the wall.

ODYSSEUS. Listen !

(Music up and down.)

ATHENE *(distant, speaking)*. Telemachus ! Watch the shadow ! Watch the shadow on the wall !

(Music up and down.)

TELEMACHUS. I hear, deathless one ! My eyes are yours.

ATHENE. Look not behind you at the stranger ! Watch the shadow of his head and hand !

(Music up and down to murmuring spring. Athene's trumpet draws the changing outline of the shadow.)

He that was old——

ODYSSEUS. —is young. He that stooped——

ATHENE. —is once more upright.

TELEMACHUS. The shadow face is changing ! And the real . . . ?

ATHENE. —is changing too. The head Penelope outlined with her pin, that day eighteen years ago, Apollo, at my instance, draws for you now, Telemachus. The head of long-suffering Odysseus——

ODYSSEUS. My head !

TELEMACHUS. Father ? Father !

(Music up and out. Pause.)

ODYSSEUS. Well, my boy, am I a great disappointment to you, now that you see me untransformed by Athene's art ?

TELEMACHUS. I—I don't know.

ODYSSEUS *(laughs)*. I have my answer, then.

TELEMACHUS. But I don't understand. Why that disguise ? Eumæus is as safe as houses.

THE RESCUE

- ODYSSEUS. No man is as safe as that, dear boy. When you are my age—my *real* age, I mean—you will realise the advantages of guile. Besides, Eumæus is not the only inhabitant of this island who will be aware of my presence—at least I hope not.
- TELEMACHUS. They should be feeling it this moment !
Why are we standing here doing nothing ?
- ODYSSEUS. Because, until Hermes gives the sign, there is nothing for us to do—nothing, that is, except rediscover one another.
- TELEMACHUS. There couldn't be time enough for that, Father. I . . . you see . . . (*bursting out*) what I mean is, I hate having to think of more than one thing at a time. And now there's yourself . . . and myself . . . and Mother . . . Oh ! and all the rest of it ! You see, I've been waiting for this moment for years—imagining it, planning it. And now that it has come, it's different somehow.
- ODYSSEUS. You are like your mother, Telemachus : you hate surprises.
- TELEMACHUS. Yes, perhaps I do.
- ODYSSEUS. But the great moments in life never happen as you planned or imagined them : they are disconcerting, unpunctual, and it is only afterwards that they seem to you greater than anything you had imagined. I could tell you stories of the not uneventful last ten years of my life . . .
- TELEMACHUS. Yes, yes ! Tell me ! Tell me !
- ODYSSEUS. You little know what you ask. What shall I find to tell you, in these few moments, as we halt on the edge of our going ?
- TELEMACHUS. But—everything !
- ODYSSEUS. My boy, I stand at last at the centre of my circle. How shall I reach—for your sake—back to that circumference traced by a myriad moments ? Shall I tell you of the Lestrygonians—those monsters who received us with politeness, then seized and ate one of my comrades ?
- TELEMACHUS (*laughs*).

THE RESCUE

ODYSSEUS. It was no laughing matter, Telemachus. Nor yet was the foul prison of the witch Circe, who beguiled us, transforming my friends into swine by her arts.

TELEMACHUS. Yet you escaped?

ODYSSEUS. In the end. We always escaped in the end—or I did. The others weren't so lucky.

TELEMACHUS. You lost them all?

ODYSSEUS. Little by little. It was pertinacity they lacked. They wanted rest, poor fellows, and even death seemed better than to go on struggling. I didn't feel like that. I wanted to get home—to get home . . .

Ah! Telemachus! Dear son! May you never know the agony of divided longing as I knew it when we sailed within earshot of the Sirens' voices.

TELEMACHUS. What was their song like?

ODYSSEUS. If I could remember that I should not be here to tell you. I stuffed my companions' ears with wax and made them bind me to the mast.

(Music up and to background.)

And then the music began, like a soft scented breeze at evening. It was the same music as that with which the Lotus-Eaters accompanied their persuasions.

I heard a snatch of it one night in Circe's palace, between sunset and dawn.

Always it has haunted my ears, seeking to drug me with its sweetness. Seven years I lived a half-willing captive to it, in the cave of Calypso.

Only now has it left me—for a time. When I come to die I shall hear it again.

(Music up and out.)

TELEMACHUS. Music and danger—

ODYSSEUS. When you are in the one, you can always hear the other—if you listen.

(Wind music up, gently sighing.)

What's that?

TELEMACHUS. Only a bit of breeze. It always gets up for an hour or so about this time, even on the stillest days.

THE RESCUE

ODYSSEUS. 'M ! I think it's more than that. My poor boy,
I'm afraid there are some fresh surprises in
store for you.

(Music up, with Hermes' flute—scherzando.)

HERMES *(sings)*.
Lighten your head and
Fold away your love !
Scatter the fledgéd drove
Of star-bright words !

TELEMACHUS. Hermes ! captain of raiders !

HERMES *(sings)*.
Heed the right of you,
Heed the left of you,
Enemies put out a
Leg to trip you, a
Hand to grip you, an
Arm to clip you.
Go and be bold !

ATHENE *(sings)*.
The perfect moment
Rhymes with the pulse of the God.

HERMES *(sings)*.
Follow my brows in the
Cleft of the rock, in the
Swirl of the stream, in the
Bend of the tree, in the
Scudding cloud.

TELEMACHUS. The lesson of Phemius was learnt, Arch-reiver !

HERMES *(sings)*.
Be as I am !
Heartless, an arrowed
Head, a curving mouth
Of deceit, the face of the
Loaded dice. Leave
No room for others' thoughts.
Be the same as
Ever you were.

ATHENE *(sings)*.
Go and be bold !

(Music up and out.)

THE RESCUE

ODYSSEUS. The gods are right, Telemachus : we must be off. Eumaeus warned you that I should talk your head off, and I must confess I should like to. However, we shall have plenty of time for that later on. Son, you can't rebind your sandal without looking what you're doing. Let your eyes leave my face for an instant . . .

(Music up and out, as on p. 54, Part I.)

TELEMACHUS *(gasp of dismay)*. Father ! What ? . . . Goddess ! What is this trick again ? At this, of all moments, to throw again over my father's shoulders the heavy cloak of old age and lameness ! I thought we had done with all that rubbish . . .

ODYSSEUS. Softly, Telemachus ! Softly ! There's no harm done. You ought to know better than to question Athene's acts. She has never let us down yet—and never will.

TELEMACHUS. But why—?

ODYSSEUS. You're being rather stupid and pig-headed. Don't you understand how much easier it will be for me to get those fellows where and when I want them, if there is no chance of my being recognised by anyone—before I choose to be ? You don't ? Well, that's how it is. And now we really must be going, if we are to reach the palace before nightfall. Lead on !—or rather, give your old father your arm, down this slippery path.

TELEMACHUS. This isn't a bit as I'd planned it. I don't believe in this shabby way of doing things.

ODYSSEUS *(laughs loud and long)*. Another of life's sad surprises, Telemachus !

(Cross-fade music—muted string scherzo.)

HERMES *(sings, distant)*.

Heed the right of you !

Heed the left of you !

Enemies put out a

Leg to trip you, a

Hand to grip you, an

Arm to clip you

Go and be bold.

(Music up—2 minutes—then out behind dialogue.)

THE RESCUE

TELEMACHUS (*anxiously*). Father, the sun's getting low.

ODYSSEUS. I know, my boy. I can't go any faster with this leg, I'm afraid.

TELEMACHUS. We haven't far to go now.

ODYSSEUS. No. I can see the house of my old friend, Deipyrus the tanner, glimmering in that grove of oak trees. Tell me—how does the old fellow?

TELEMACHUS. He doesn't. He died two years ago. It broke his heart to see the way things were going . . . and you did not come back . . .

ODYSSEUS. Ah! I'm sorry to hear that. Who has taken his place? One of those guests of ours?

TELEMACHUS. Not exactly. His son's there now—but he's no good—went over to the enemy at once. Got fat on it too.

ODYSSEUS. The list seems a pretty long one.

TELEMACHUS. Not so long really. It's just that the people on it all have names you'd be likely to know. The loyal are immeasurably more numerous—but their names would not strike you.

(*Music up, cross-fade Irus' rattle.*)

IRUS (*with distance*). Hi, you! Stop a minute!

(*Twirl of rattle.*)

TELEMACHUS (*whispers*). Pay no attention, Father!

ODYSSEUS. Who is it? I don't see anyone. (*Rattle.*) What's that queer noise? (*Rattle.*) It seems to be coming from behind this low wall.

IRUS. Stop! I say—whoever you are. Irus must have his word. (*Sharp twirl of rattle.*) No one must pass *me* by. Man, 'woman, child—all must have truck with Irus. A word—hard as a pebble—or bright-winged as an insect that crosses the sun—or soft as a pat of unleavened dough—a word must fly between Irus and everybody in Ithaca. Irus collects words . . . and if not a word, a gift. Better a gift! (*Rattle.*) What have you for me then—a word?—or something precious to add to my bag? (*Pause, then rattle.*) Silence adds nought to nought. Silence is no gift. You don't

THE RESCUE

believe what I tell you? You think I have no bag? Then take a peep at this.

(Orchestral gesture.)

ODYSSEUS. What have we here, swinging over the wall?

Yes . . . it is a bundle . . . on the end of a rope.

TELEMACHUS *(whispers)*. Pay no attention! Come away!

I know all about this.

ODYSSEUS. I just want to see . . .

IRUS. Come! A coin or two won't break you—I know what everyone on this island is worth—so pay up!—till next time. Look! you are the well . . . you are the water in it . . . I dip my bucket . . . down! . . . up! . . . down! . . . up! . . .

TELEMACHUS *(shouts)*. Down!

(Music: metallic crash.)

IRUS *(shriek of alarm, then close to mike)*. Ah-ha! So it's my Lord Telemachus! But I was too quick for you. Ah! a silver-handled knife—no less! Then you can afford to pay for the rope you cut. A fine new bit, too—look at it! And here *(jingle of metal)* this is mine—all mine—a gold mine. *(Shrill laugh and jingle.)* Savings of widows and orphans. How long would it take an old beggar like your friend here to collect that?

ODYSSEUS. Years . . . eighteen, perhaps. I'm not a very successful beggar. It's not in my character, I daresay.

IRUS. How much did the young lord here give you?

ODYSSEUS. Not much less than I asked of him.

IRUS. Then what about that new rope, my pretty man! Just a coin or two . . .

TELEMACHUS. Come and get them!

IRUS. Is that the only word you have for Irus? A sharp flint of a word! My masters will be displeased when they hear of it.

TELEMACHUS. You dare tell them lies about me!

ODYSSEUS *(interrupting firmly)*. Go your way, young Sir!

TELEMACHUS. Wha—what's that you said?

THE RESCUE

ODYSSSEUS. Go your way, I said. Friends and kindred are impatient for you. Here is the right companion for me.

TELEMACHUS. The right . . . ! . . . By all the gods . . . !

ODYSSSEUS. I have at present nothing further to ask of you.
Irus here shall be my fogleman.

IRUS. Is it a bed for the night you are looking for?
I'll get it you.

ODYSSSEUS. For the night—and other nights. Take me to your masters. Perhaps I could be useful to them.

IRUS. That you could ! And I will take the commission.
It will more than pay for my rope. Till we meet again, Lord Telemachus. (*Fade.*)

TELEMACHUS (*dully*). Till we meet again.

(*Rattle prolonged. Cross-fade music—20 minutes—then cross-fade voice.*)

IRUS. . . . and on this wall—just here—was a picture of him, drawn, they say, by the Lady Penelope herself.

ODYSSSEUS. I see nothing.

IRUS. Oh ! it was rubbed out only the other day.
Others are masters here now and they don't want people reminded.

ODYSSSEUS (*laughs unpleasantly*).

IRUS. Now just you wait here, old fellow, till I come back for you. I've got to see how the land lies. There are tricky customers in the palace these days and even I, Irus—of course I'm powerful enough in my way—in my way . . . but even I have to watch my step. But they won't mind you if you keep quiet. That's the important thing for you to remember—when you get into the hall, make yourself small and keep quiet—see ?

ODYSSSEUS. I see.

IRUS. They won't have started eating yet. When the wine's been round a few times it'll be safe to fetch you in. Then you can take your cue from me. I'll have a word with Amphinomus. I know how to get round him. Melanthius

THE RESCUE

and Ctesippus now—you can't risk anything with them—they're nasty—you know what I mean—*nasty* ! But Amphinomus is always ready to see anyone who's willing to make himself useful. See ?

ODYSSEUS. I see.

IRUS. And now you wait here till I come for you.
Don't move. You can have my bag to sit on.
There's trust for you !

(Rattle up and gradually out.)

ODYSSEUS. This is my last rest alone
Before the end : the final pause
On the final edge.

(Music to background.)

There it is before me,
My house, my home,
Rising, tier after tier, like a lifted face
Against the evening's violet disc :
Those slender pillars crowned with sunset,
That armour of stone for my love,
That image of safety for my garnered heart,
Certain and grave and clear as a ship
Afloat in its own sea of cypress and black poplars
and myrtle,

Presages of night.

Now it swims indeed and trembles in my eyes
Blinded with memory's tears. Yet I think
That face of stone looks only as much older as
The year that is passing into autumn—as
The cheeks of a woman who has waited long for
Her husband's return.

(Music up and down.)

Now, dying his daily death, Apollo
Sheds his blood on the broad step,
Across the columns' well-turned abacus,
And pours his scarlet flood in at the very door.

(Music up and down.)

Soon it will be dark.
When this night of nights is done,
I shall have restored to the god
The blood he gave, and

THE RESCUE

The stream will have flowed
Back through the lofty door
Of my house ; bleaching
Traitors' veins. Then,
After the night of nights will come
The day of days. After the enslavement
The rescue !

(Music up and down.)

Now the well-hung doors are flung open wide :
My nostrils are filled with the stench of meat and
burning fat.

(Music up and down.)

Like a nest of wasps the hall is all a-buzz,
And among the tumid shadows
That wave and flutter from the echoing roof-tree
like black sails in a stormy sea,
Livid shapes of men scramble and push at some
hoggish game,
Or shake their bare arms at one another
Across the long table.
O eyes, fail in your duty !
Spread a curtain of night
Betwixt me and that scene of shame !

(Music up and quickly out.)

But that great tall figure now
Plunging out of the shadow towards me,
Pausing in the sunray on the step, his cloak red
as the light :

That is not an enemy. *(Laughs.)* Preoccupied,
Talking to himself as usual,
Eumaeus does not even see me where I sit
Upon this bundle by the sullied wall.

(Cross-fade.)

EUMAEUS *(to himself)*. . . . and it has got to be soon. If
they cannot wait, neither can we. *(Seeing*
Odysseus.) Hullo, old fellow ! You look as
patient as ever.

ODYSSEUS. I am practised in that virtue, if in no others.

EUMAEUS. And who set you down there ? Telemachus ?

ODYSSEUS. Irus was his name, I think.

EUMAEUS. Irus ! You keep strange company.

THE RESCUE

ODYSSEUS. Stranger than you keep—in there?

EUMAEUS. Umph? What's that you say? But you can't know, you can't even imagine . . . You should see Penelope and Telemachus as I've just left them—drunk with the illusion each gives the other. Hand in hand, gaze in gaze, they are wrapped in a dream. They are more like lovers than mother and son.

ODYSSEUS. She unmans him with her love?

EUMAEUS. He is all she has left . . . perhaps . . . But ah! I could throttle him for giving in so easily—now—at the very last moment—when he and I together—we could at least have—

PHEMIUS (*breaking in with warning sadness*). Eumaeus! Enduring heart! Is the illusion only theirs?

EUMAEUS. Phemius! You here? Why aren't you inside—with them—inventing a heroic past for each in turn, to fill your lying mouth with stolen bread?

PHEMIUS. Because I have not yet been called to-day. And who is this?

EUMAEUS. A man of—a beggar, as you can see for yourself.

PHEMIUS. Beggars are not the most unlucky in Ithaca to-day.

ODYSSEUS. Are you pitying yourself?

PHEMIUS. No. I am a poet, so I'm never unlucky. My trade is to interpret. I'm indispensable, both to the tyrant and to the slave—even to a beggar like yourself.

EUMAEUS. Interpret! You're clever with words. You tell folks what they want to hear.

PHEMIUS. Only those who are not fit to hear anything else. Fate deals with them—

EUMAEUS. Not soon enough.

ODYSSEUS. Poet! listen to me. I've seen and done too much to need your words. If you want inspiration, look in my eyes and then tell those fellows in there what you've seen. That will make you a song for to-night.

PHEMIUS. I'm always ready to take a tip. Look up, then!

(*Music up and out—4 seconds.*)

(*In a sudden surprise and triumph.*) Eumaeus!

THE RESCUE

You stubborn old fool ! The gods have indeed made you blind. (*Laughing.*) Well, you bring this friend of yours into the hall later on. "They" will feed him all right. And now I must go and sing for my supper—but not the song they expect. Take care you don't miss it !
(*Music up and out—cross-fade Odysseus, chuckling.*)

EUMAEUS. What's he after ? What did he mean ? Blind ? Me ?

ODYSSEUS. Never mind what he meant. Someone's coming up this way through the trees. Who are those two with their smart clothes ?

EUMAEUS. Sh ! Not so loud ! The older one, with the greying hair and the sneer round his nose, is Antinous, son of Eupeithes. He's quick with his tongue and can sway the rest as he pleases. The younger, with the fillet in his hair, is Eurymachus, son of Polybus. He's a sad case—sad and bad—one of those who think they can help the weaker side by pretending friendship for the stronger. It never works. Until just lately Eurymachus was still playing for time ; then, when Telemachus slipped off to the mainland, he went over completely. He and Antinous were the prime movers in the plot to waylay the boy and kill him. It failed, as you know, and they look pretty sour about it.
(*Cross-fade.*)

EURYMACHUS. Of course it's a set-back.

ANTINOUS. I don't underestimate it.

EURYMACHUS. The point is, the people will have seen him. We can't pretend——

ANTINOUS. Friend Eurymachus, we don't have to pretend. Our position is impregnable at last : Amphinomus and I have seen to that.

EURYMACHUS. There you go, overestimating our strength ! What could be done safely before, must now be done in the face of danger—boldly.

ANTINOUS (*dogmatically*). Preparations have already——
(*Low, sharp voice.*) Who's that ?

EURYMACHUS. Where ?

THE RESCUE

ANTINOUS. Over there—in the shadow of the wall.

EURYMACHUS. Oh that ! Some old beggar, by the looks of him.

ANTINOUS. But that's Eumacus with him.

EURYMACHUS. What of it ?

ANTINOUS. I'd like to know what he's doing, skulking around here ?

EURYMACHUS. You'd better ask him, then. He's only a pig-keeper, you know. Like to like . . .

ANTINOUS. I shall make a note of it.

EURYMACHUS. Let us go in.

(Fade up noise of a large room full of people all talking at once. Scraping of benches, banging of wooden platters, coarse laughter. During the following sequence scraps of talk emerge fragmentarily from the general confusion and quickly return to it, like swimmers plunging through a heavy sea.)

(A little bizarre background music of percussion—a line or two repeated ad lib.)

What's all the row about ?

ANTINOUS. Quarrelling about who's to sit where, as usual.

EURYMACHUS. Can't it be decided once for all ? I hate disorder.

ANTINOUS. They're in one of their silly moods—I can see that. Stay by me, Eurymachus : together we can manage the lot.

(Music up. Cross-fade hubbub.)

PEISANDER *(cool, insolent)*. Go round to the other side of the table, then, Agelaus. Plenty of room there.

AGELAUS *(fussy, dictatorial)*. But this is my place, Peisander, son of Polycctor. And when you address me, please remember my patronymic.

PEISANDER. First come, first served, is the rule here, son of Damastor.

AGELAUS. Since when, may I ask ?

(General laughter—fade.)

AMPHINOMUS *(hard, self-satisfied, but with an undercurrent of hysteria)*. Someone has got to take the head of the table, and who more suitable than I, Amphinomus of Dulichium ? That's what I ask myself.

LEOCRITUS *(disillusioned, cynical)*. Ha ! The rich men first !

CTESIPPUS *(gross, guttural)*. That right's, Leocritus, son of Euenor. I agree with that.

THE RESCUE

EURYDAMAS (*cultivated and rather tired*). It is not a question of how much you possess but of who you are. My family happens to be the oldest on the island.

NOEMON (*old and waspish*). No older than mine, Eurydamas. And I "happen" to know that I am the richest of us all, if it comes to that.

(*Murmurs and laughter.*)

AMPHINOMUS (*quellingly*). It doesn't come to that, Noemon, son of Phronius. Riches have nothing to do with precedence . . . at any rate here. I am Amphinomus, son of Nisus, son of Arctias. Nobody knows who your grandfather was, Noemon—nor *your* father, Ctesippus, for that matter.

(*Loud laughter.*)

CTESIPPUS. Say that again and see what happens to you.

NOEMON. The impertinence ! I could prove to you . . . at least twenty generations. . . .

(*Music out. Cross-fade repeated banging on table, at first quick, then getting slower as the noise dies down. Finally a single thump.*)

ANTINOUS (*incisively*). Order ! Order ! We must have order ! This kind of thing will not do. It is unnecessary ; worse, it is dangerous. Precedence is not a matter for dispute : it is a tissue of facts, and Medon, the herald, is in possession of them. It is for him to decide. Where is he ? Let him be fetched.

VOICES (*at various distances*). Medon ! Medon !

CTESIPPUS. I'm against all this fuss.

NOEMON. Where is that miserable pursuivant ?

MEDON (*approaching out of breath, embarrassed and apologetic*). Immediately, Sirs, immediately ! Now let me get quite clear what it is you want. One difficulty that occurs to me is that there are quite a few of you gentlemen with whose ancestry and pretensions I am not as familiar as of course I should be. I think I may say that as a young man nobody could have caught me out in a date ; but of late years—my home

THE RESCUE

life not being as happy as I could have wished—
I must confess I have let things slide a bit.
Nevertheless——

CTESIPPUS. Oh, come on ! Make it short !

PEISANDER. Come to the point ! We're waiting.

MELANTHIUS. But what is the point ?

EURYMACHUS. In the first place, who shall take the head of the table ; Melanthius ?

MEDON. Well—ahem !—the answer to that is simple enough. It is Lord—strictly speaking Prince—Telemachus, who should be seated where—ahem !—Melanthius, son of Dolius has—er—placed himself.

MELANTHIUS. Here I am and here I mean to stay.

AMPHINOMUS (*hurriedly*). In any case that question is already disposed of. Telemachus has refused the honour of sitting with us at all. He prefers the society of Mentor and Halitherses—as you can see if you look over there in the corner beyond the fire.

PEISANDER. Family hangers-on !

VOICES. Turn them out !

ANTINOUS. Order ! Order, I say !

(*Music up and out. His voice is drowned in renewed hubbub. Cross-fade.*)

IRUS. Telemachus ! Your Honour !

HALITHERSES. Get away, you scum !

MENTOR. Go back to your friends, Irus. We don't want you spying on us.

IRUS (*with an effort at dignity*). I'm not speaking to you, Halitherses, or to Mentor either.

TELEMACHUS. Wait a moment. What do you want with me, Irus ?

IRUS. It's about that friend of yours—you know, the old 'un I met you with this morning.

TELEMACHUS. Well, what about him ?

IRUS. He's waiting outside. I told him I'd bring him in, if I saw a likely moment. The poor old chap's been waiting there for hours. He ought to have a bite of supper. If I don't fetch him in now, it'll be too late.

THE RESCUE

TELEMACHUS. Ah ! . . . well, yes . . . I should say it was about time, from the look of things. Go and fetch him—or wait ! No ! Eumaeus shall go. I'll find him.

(Fade up hubbub, with background music as before.)

MELANTHIUS. Here ! I haven't finished with that dish. Hand it back, Leodes !

LEODES. But so far I've had nothing whatever to eat, Melanthius. Everybody snatches the dishes away before I have time to get hold of anything.

MELANTHIUS. What's that in front of you ?

LEODES. Only bits of gristle.

(Music up and down.)

AGELAUS. All right, Noemon ! If you want to make a speech, then make a speech. No one's stopping you.

NOEMON. But how can I in this din ? Heaven and Hell !

(Music up and down.)

ANTINOUS. I've been holding this cup out for the last five minutes and no one has attempted to fill it. My patience is exhausted.

AMPHINOMUS. Those girls are lazy, that's what it is. They'll have to be beaten again. I'll tell the overseer.

(Music up and down.)

CTESIPPUS *(whispering)*. Are you quite sure, Irus ?

IRUS *(whispering)*. Quite, Ctesippus of Same. Exactly your type—thick hair and strong teeth . . . a perfect figure . . . *(Giggles.)*

(Music up and down.)

PHISANDER. That's a fine clasp you've got on your cloak, Alastor. New ?

ALASTOR *(slow and soft)*. 'M ! New on me, that's to say. *(Laughter.)*

EURYMACHUS. How much did you give for it ?

ALASTOR. Give ? What d'you take me for, Eurymachus ?

(Laughter.) That fellow Epeius was fool enough to kick up a fuss. I told him the jewel would look better on me than on a wrinkled old man like him.

ANTINOUS. Well, we know where he is now.

THE RESCUE

ALASTOR. Thanks to my good friend Amphinomus.

(*More laughter. Cross-fade.*)

NOEMON. It's time the bard sang. Phemius ! Where's Phemius ?

VOICES. Phemius !

EURYDAMAS. But *I* wanted to sing.

MELANTHIUS. You shut up, Eurydamas. No one wants to hear you sing. You've no voice——

AMPHINOMUS. No invention either.

AGELAUS. You can only sing about yourself—we've heard you.

EURYDAMAS. That's very rude.

ANTINOUS. Silence ! (*Bangs as before.*) Silence for the bard.
(*Noise out and music up and out.*)

PHEMIUS (*hiding secret exultation behind an ironic display of fantasticality*). You want me to sing, my lords ? To display my poor talents in your honour ? What shall it be to-night ? What would your lordships have to distract your minds from the heavy responsibilities of your estate ?

LEOCRITUS (*airily*). Anything ! Sing anything you like.

EURYMACHUS. For the gods' sake let us have something new for a change—something different. I'm sick of all your songs—know them by heart.

PHEMIUS. Something different, Eurymachus, son of Polybus ? What then ? Shall I pose you a rebus, an acrostic ? Some tongue-twisting charade, some enigma to flush your brains ? Or shall I weave you a logogriph to make your bellies ache with laughter ?

AGELAUS. Yes, yes !

LEOCRITUS. Fine ! Anything you like.

CTESIPPUS. No ! We don't want muck like that. Give us a song—something with a tune in it.

EURYDAMAS (*assertively*). My singing would be more fun than a logogriph.

(*Laughter.*)

PHEMIUS. Sirs ! This is no time for singing. To-night the poet dares to choose for you. Taking into account the value of your time, I propose a simple puzzle to divert you for a moment . . .

THE RESCUE

an image . . . a metaphor . . . a pool of
dark, still water reflecting the future . . .

VOICES (*whispering*). What's he up to? What's he
mean?

PHEMIUS. Listen then, Lords of Ithaca! Summon your
great wits to divine my meaning.

(*Pianissimo music to background and hold.*)

Who is it that wears the clothing of night

On the body of day?

That comes to every man's door

As to his own?

Whose home is the narrow world?

Whose heart is the flung stone?

VOICES (*whispering*). . . . clothing of night? . . . his
own? . . . *his own*? . . . narrow world . . .
the flung stone?

CTESIPPUS (*loudly*). Typical poet's rubbish!

VOICES. Sh!

PHEMIUS. You cannot find the answer in your minds?
Behold it, then, over there, between the wide-
flung doors.

(*Music up—a sinister, lame, dragging measure, very
quiet but kept in foreground with voices in 'back-
ground.'*)

LEOCRITUS. An old, old man.

AGELAUS. Bent double.

EURYMACHUS. Dragging on the arm of Eumaeus, the tall swine-
herd.

ALASTOR. So bent I cannot see his face.

EURYDAMAS. Nothing but a tangle of hair like the nest of a bird.

AGELAUS. He totters away from his supporter, lifts one hand
against a pillar.

NORMON. Yet comes on towards us, down the storied hall.

AMPHINOMUS (*screaming*). There's something wrong! I don't
like this!

(*Music up and down.*)

LEOCRITUS. A bat.

PEISANDER. An old eagle rather.

CTESIPPUS. A goat.

PHEMIUS. A man!

(*Music up and down.*)

THE RESCUE

AGELAUS. Rags—thunder-yellow tatters, vile and filthy—
flutter round his trembling limbs.

EURYDAMAS. His skinny arms, when he raises them, feeling his
way forwards, are like dead branches dyed red
by the firelight.

NOEMON. On he comes . . . still nearer . . .

ALASTOR. Yet seems no clearer. I cannot see his eyes.

(Music up and down.)

AMPHINOMUS *(screams with hysterical surprise)*. Night has fallen !
It is night already ! Lights ! Lights ! Bring
torches !

(Music up and down.)

ANTINOUS. Eumaeus ! what is this spirit of the dead you are
bringing amongst us ? You have scared
Amphinomus, son of Nisus.

EUMAEUS. It is the answer to Phemius' riddle—the image he
put into your brain, Antinous.

EURYDAMAS. Now he raises his head and I see his eyes at last.
How strange ! His eyelids are hard, like finger-
nails, and underneath they make a straight
ridge. They are snake's eyes—black as charred
wood, yet red at the heart where fire still
burns.

(Music up and down.)

PHEMIUS. Are you afraid of an old man ?

IRUS *(with distance)*. Of an old beggar ?

(Music up and out.)

VOICES. A beggar ! So that's what the bard meant !
Nothing but a poor old beggar !

ANTINOUS. Are you dumb, old fellow ? Those who can't
ask, don't get.

VOICES. Speak ! Beg !

AMPHINOMUS. No ! No ! There is something wrong, I tell
you. Night has come upon us unawares . . .
the night that comes before death !

(Laughter.)

As you will not listen to me, I call upon our host,
Telemachus, to put this bird of ill-omen out
of doors. Telemachus, for your mother's sake !
Penelope !

(Music to background.)

THE RESCUE

- PENELOPE (*low voice*). Yes ! Yes ! Penelope hears you, though it is not on her you call. Cries of despair always fall upon the wrong ears.
- EURYCLEA. Madam . . .
- PENELOPE (*impatiently*). What is it, Euryclea ?
- EURYCLEA. Keep behind this pillar, dear light, or they will see you.
- PENELOPE. Don't fuss so, Euryclea ! They will only see me if they look up, and they are far too pre-occupied at the moment for that.
- EURYNOME. But, Madam—
- PENELOPE. You too, Eurynome ! Be quiet ! I want to see this stranger. He interests me.
- EURYNOME. But, Madam, it isn't safe !
- PENELOPE (*laughing softly*). Look, Euryclea ! do look at those buffoons down there, how they crowd and crane their necks—half curious and half afraid. There must be something—some strange force . . .
- EURYCLEA. Come away, dear light, come away ! (*Hubbub to background.*) There now ! I knew something terrible was going to happen !
- PENELOPE. I did not see. What happened, Euryclea ?
- EURYCLEA. It was Eupheithes' cursed son, Antinous. All of a sudden, while the stranger's back was turned, he rose and took up his stool and threw it at the old, bent back.
- PENELOPE. The beggar is staggering, but he has not fallen. O shame ! Shame on them all !
- EURYCLEA. Madam, Telemachus advances. He parts the throng and imposes silence.
- (*Music out behind speech.*)
- TELEMACHUS. Shame on you all ! And above all on you, Antinous. Have you no sense of what is fitting ? Don't you know better than to hit a cripple—a cripple and a guest ? Double shame—
- LEODES. I do not approve Antinous' action.
- ANTINOUS. I acted for the good of all—
- TELEMACHUS. A curse waits on such actions.
- (*Murmurs of fear.*)

THE RESCUE

You hang your heads. Lift them rather. Look up to where my mother stands in the gallery, a witness to your ill-treatment of a guest in our house.

VOICES. Penelope !

EURYMACHUS. Robed in the grey of winter——

EURYDAMAS. —as in the sad air itself——

PEISANDER. —and as beseems her mind.

(Music up and down.)

ANTINOUS *(setting a high, romantic tone)*. Never have you looked so fair as to-night, Penelope. Petals of light shine softly in your hair. A sky of summer broods in the recesses of your robe. The white hands of Athene have smoothed your brows and the hollow of your cheek. I, Antinous, have a gift to offer you. An embroidered robe clasped with the finest gold awaits your promise to be my wife.

(Music up and down.)

EURYMACHUS *(taking the cue)*. I, Eurymachus, send you a chain of amber like beads of sunlight.

EURYDAMAS. And I, Eurydamas, a pair of ear-rings with triple drops that will brush your shoulders.

PEISANDER. Peisander, son of Polycctor, offers you a single jewel.

(Music up and out.)

PENELOPE *(with echo)*. My lords ! Your offers go wide of their mark. What can you give me better than all I had in years gone by ? You should know on what treasure my heart is set.

Jewels were not what I sought from strong-hearted Odysseus ;

The lesson of life he taught me

I will not relinquish in this the hour of my final surrender.

If now my choice must at last be made

The hand of the dead

Shall decide between you.

ANTINOUS *(angrily)*. Phemius has taught you to speak to us in riddles.

THE RESCUE

AMPHINOMUS. This is intolerable !

PEISANDER. I demand a clear statement.

MELANTHIUS. It's perfectly simple : all we want is a name—
preferably my own.

OTHERS. No ! No !

PENELOPE. I will be clear and simple enough.

To those who would have me to wife,

I propose a test.

Here in this hall shall be set up

A line of twelve axes . . .

One for each of my suitors.

Whoso shall have strength to draw

The great bow of Odysseus

And shoot an arrow

Straight through those gleaming heads of iron—

His will I be.

Everything I have shall be his—all

But one thing. My memory, I think,

Like a spirit of the dead shall wander

For ever through the desolate airs

Of this house, seeking its own.

MELANTHIUS. It is not your memory we desire, Lady.

LEOCRITUS. Come down, Penelope, come down ! Stand
among us and tell us more nearly what you
would have us do.

EURYMACHUS. You need fear nothing.

PENELOPE. Very well. I will come down. Euryclea, you
will attend me.

(Fade up music.)

ATHENE *(sings)*.

Telemachus !

Be swift and secret.

Find out the traitors' weapons.

Seize and hide them away.

I will hold back the dawn, so you

Slip through the curtain of day.

Only be swift !

(Music up and cross-fade.)

AMPHINOMUS. But the bow of Odysseus—where shall we lay
hands on it ?

THE RESCUE

PENELOPE. I have it here. Eurynome ! Bring the box.

See, my lords ! The gigantic bow

Fits its case

As it were an instrument

Of music—the curvéd mouth

Of Apollo himself.

(Murmurs as the suitors crowd forward to look at the bow.)

NOEMON. What a size !

PEISANDER. Much too heavy.

CTESIPPUS. It's a trick.

ALASTOR. Made yesterday, I shouldn't wonder.

TELEMACHUS. Silence, all of you ! I ask for silence, in my mother's name. The sooner this is over the better. You never stop complaining that you've waited long enough. Well then, let the final test be here and now—Eumæus, take my cloak. You, Mentor, fetch the axes from the armoury. And you, Phemius, help me to set them up.

Now, make room there ! Stand aside ! Move the table and make a space down the centre of the hall. Menon ! Move the torch-stands nearer. We must have as much light as we can get.

(Music up and out.)

ODYSSEUS *(whispering)*. Euryclea !

EURYCLEA. What is it ? I haven't anything for you. I'm poor——

ODYSSEUS. Not so poor you can't afford me a moment's attention.

EURYCLEA. I must go to my mistress. I haven't time. Let go of me !

ODYSSEUS. Not till you've done as I ask. Come into the shadow of this pillar. Now listen. How well do you remember your master ?

EURYCLEA. Odysseus ? He was my baby before he was my master. Every inch of his body——

ODYSSEUS. The scar on his ankle, made by the boar's tusk——

THE RESCUE

EURYCLEA. What do you know of that ?

ODYSSEUS. Never mind. Can you recall the feel of it ?

EURYCLEA. Of course I can ! It was shaped like a single-headed axe—the long straight haft and then a puckered ridge of skin at the top, curving like the iron.

ODYSSEUS. Give me your hand. Now . . . did it feel like that ?

EURYCLEA. Ah !

ODYSSEUS. If you make a sound I'll throttle you. Euryclea ! Pull yourself together and listen. I have work for you at this moment and there's not much time——

EURYCLEA. Oh ! Master ! My own child ! At last !

ODYSSEUS. Stop that and listen to what I have to say. You are to shut and bolt the doors—here and everywhere else in the house. See that nobody gets out—nobody. And if the women in the other part of the house should hear sounds, see to it they keep quiet. When you've made everything fast, go to your mistress and prepare her mind. Break it to her as gently as the time permits.

EURYCLEA. I obey.

(Fade up transition music — 1 minute — then out behind dialogue.)

PENELOPE. Impossible ! I do not—cannot believe it, Euryclea. Why was I not told before ?

EURYCLEA. Dear light——

PENELOPE. Yes, yes, I hear what you say—I take in the words, but—oh ! how shall I tell you ? For years the gods have confined me in a prison of stone words—words that formed no thoughts, but made the life I had to live. Now your words bring real thoughts back, and my brain tingles with them as stagnant flesh through which the blood begins once more to flow.

EURYCLEA. You need not believe me, child. At this very moment things are happening which will prove to you that I speak the truth.

THE RESCUE

PENELOPE. Things ? What things ?

(Yell of pain from orchestra.)

EURYCLEA. Hark at that. A creature died then. Deeds—great Odysseus' deeds—are hacking to shreds the prison of words. After he had spoken to me, down there in the shadow by the great door, I saw the goddess at work. I saw the years vanish from off him like snow in the warmth of a fire. I saw him grow in height like a lengthening shadow. I saw the clear purpose shining in his face as he strode into the light and seized the bow—*his* bow, that he alone has strength to draw. Soon you will be free. Soon all will be free, Penelope. Death has come to this house—death with a dozen faces. It was time.

(Music—a single gesture.)

EUMAEUS. Yes, it was time.

PENELOPE. Eumaeus ! The bow . . . !

EUMAEUS. Yes, the bow—Apollo's mouth.

PENELOPE. Those perfect lips have smiled at last.

EUMAEUS. Crafty Odysseus has put off his disguise and confronts the enemies of Ithaca in all his pride and strength. You should see him as he stands there.

PENELOPE. I will see him.

EUMAEUS. I have my orders, lady, and they are to keep you out of this.

(Music.)

EUMAEUS. Out there is no place for you. The sight—

PENELOPE. How many lie dead already ?

EUMAEUS. Three . . . perhaps four . . .

(Music.)

(Laughs.) There's no time to count.

(Pause.)

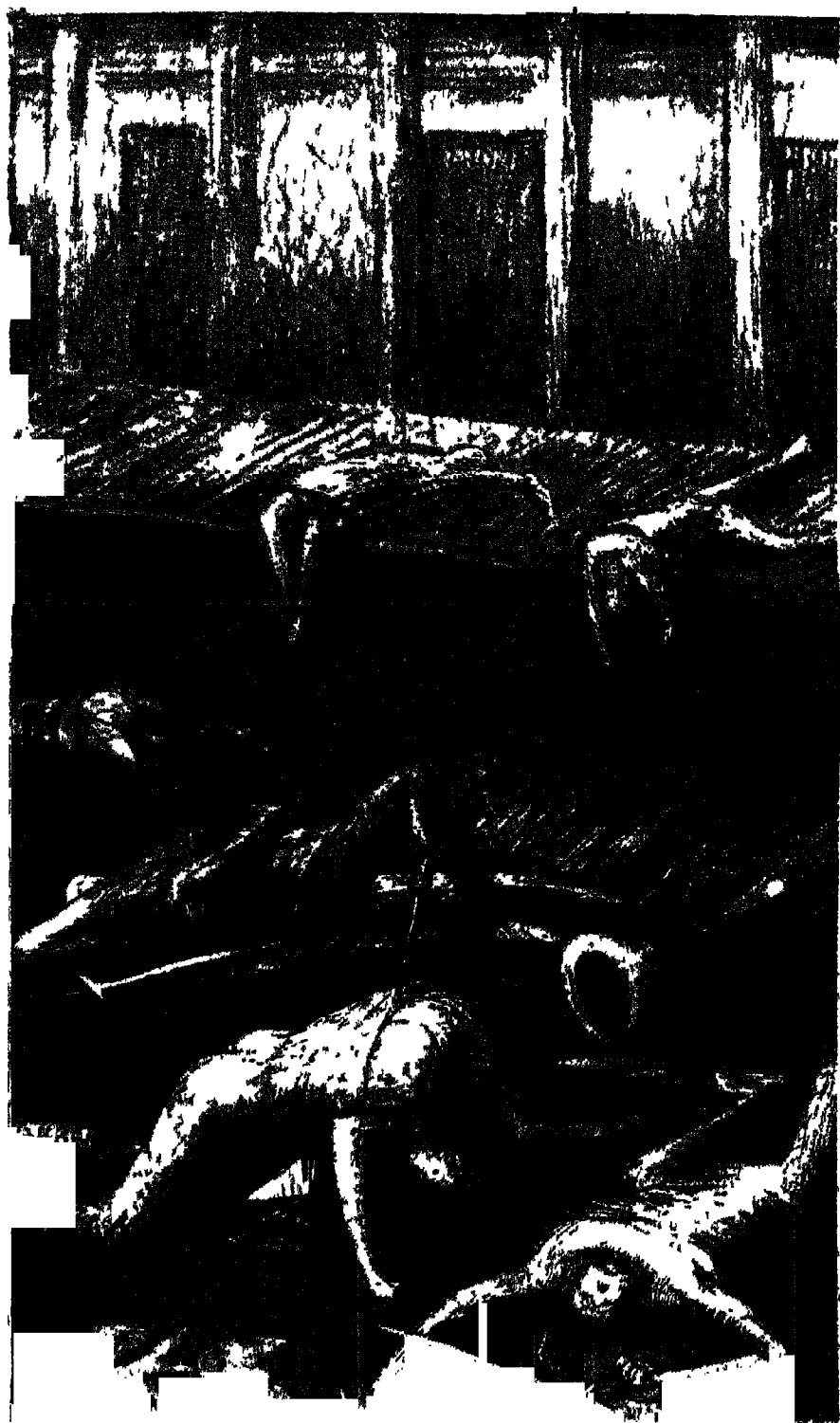
PENELOPE. Now there is silence again—a silence of stealthy footfalls. *(Shrieks.)* Odysseus ! Strike again !

(Music up and to background.)

There it is again at last ! Eumaeus, go to the parapet ; lean out, and tell me who it is that lies in agony on the ground.

THE RESCUE

- EUMAEUS (*off-mike*). Ctesippus of Samos. He has fallen on one of the axes and bleeds from the neck, like one of his own pigs. The arrow got him between the shoulders.
- PENELOPE. Oh, Eumaeus ! Eumaeus ! Lean out farther and tell me——
(*Music up, drowning her words : then down.*)
- EUMAEUS (*suddenly shouting*). Look out ! Odysseus ! Behind you——
(*Gesture of music, then yell of agony in distance. Cross-fade music up and out behind confused shouting.*)
- ODYSSEUS. Ha ! Do you think I have fought my way back to this place for less than your death ?
- EURYMACHUS. Swords out !
- ODYSSEUS. Eurymachus ! You shall not wind yourself out of this.
(*Prolonged music up and out.*)
- (*Quietly.*) Irus ! Come out from wherever you are hiding. (*Silence.*) Come out, little man. Show yourself and you shall come to no harm.
- TELEMACHUS (*whispering*). There he is ! Up there—behind the third pillar from the end. He's climbed up on to the abacus.
(*Music—xylophone—up and out.*)
- ODYSSEUS. Come down, O Irus ! You did me a service to-day. I have not forgotten.
- IRUS. What will you give me now ? My bundle's gone. I've nothing——
- ODYSSEUS. —to fear.
(*Music up and out.*)
- IRUS (*to himself*). What shall I do now ? Oh ! I am so afraid. My eyes and ears are full of the contortions of death. I am afraid to move.
(*Music up and out.*)
- ODYSSEUS. Don't be afraid, little man. Telemachus, give him your hand. (*Whispers.*) When you've got hold of him, throw him to the ground.
- TELEMACHUS. Here is my hand, Irus. Put your foot on it. Come along !
- IRUS. Lift it higher. I am trembling. I fear I shall fall.
(*Music up and out.*)



THE RESCUE

TELEMACHUS. There ! Now your hand . . .

(Thud and scream.)

ODYSSEUS. Hold him while I get my heel on his throat.

(Strangled screams and xylophone cadenza. Add orchestra, then take to background.)

PENELOPE. That stillness again. Eumaeus ! What is happening, Eumaeus ?

(Music up and down.)

EUMAEUS. I do not know. I see

Nothing, hear nothing.

The last torch has guttered

And gone out. I am leaning

On lightless air, and the dark stench of blood

Envelops my face as in a cloud.

All-wise Athene still

Holds back the dawn.

(Music up, with Athene's trumpet very distant, then down.)

PENELOPE. Odysseus ! Husband ! Telemachus !

EURYCLEA. Hush, child ! Silence is always a good omen.

PENELOPE. Not now, Euryclea,

Not at this moment.

Oh no ! This stillness is

Huge with death.

(Music up and out on a new phrase.)

ODYSSEUS *(approaching)*. Not my death, Penelope, nor our son's.

EURYCLEA. Oh, my master !

PENELOPE *(after a pause)*. Now is the time for silence.

Euryclea ! Bring a light. Hold it to his face.

Higher. Nearer. Ah yes . . . yes . . . But

the change ! The change !

(Music up—20 seconds—then out behind words.)

ODYSSEUS. These hands you are holding have freed you, and this house, and Ithaca, from a sordid curse.

The intruders—

PENELOPE *(catch of breath)*. Odysseus ! Your feet are dyed crimson with their blood.

EURYCLEA. I will fetch water. *(Fade.)*

PENELOPE. They are all dead—all ?

THE RESCUE

ODYSSEUS. Yes. Melanthius tried to get away. I killed him in the passage outside this room. I suppose he was going to ask you to plead for him. Would you have done it?

PENELOPE. No.

ODYSSEUS. I knew you would say that.

PENELOPE. But Phemius now——

ODYSSEUS. Oh, he's alive. I never meant him to die. It is a mistake to kill poets : whatever weapon you use against them turns out to be double-edged. Yes, Phemius is safe.

TELEMACHUS (*approaching*). I thank the gods for it. He was a good friend to me.

ODYSSEUS. Ah—ha ! boy. You did a good job just now. I'm proud of you.

TELEMACHUS. Thank you, Father. I'm afraid you'll be less pleased with what I have come to tell you. I suppose we ought to have foreseen something of the kind. Still . . .

PENELOPE. Something of what kind, Son ?

TELEMACHUS. The people have collected outside. They won't go away. Halitherses is leading them.

ODYSSEUS. Halitherses ! Against me ? What for ?

TELEMACHUS. Not exactly against anyone. But they seem doubtful how to take all this.

ODYSSEUS. You mean to tell me they didn't *want* to be freed ? All-Wise ! What have I done to deserve this ?

EUMAEUS. Let me talk to them, Odysseus. I'll soon settle this. Fatheads !

TELEMACHUS. Eumaeus, please leave this to me.

(*Pause.*)

EUMAEUS. I'll hold my tongue. I'm only a swineherd, after all. (*Fade.*)

PENELOPE. Eumaeus !

TELEMACHUS. Let him go, Mother. He'll come back. Now look here, Father, I don't think you quite appreciate the position. The people are not ungrateful : they are simply bewildered and uncertain. They've been through a lot, remember.

ODYSSEUS. And I ? I've been through nothing, I suppose.

TELEMACHUS. Nobody suggests that ; but there's a difference.

THE RESCUE

You chose your life—and in many ways I believe you have enjoyed it, with all its troubles and adventures.

PENELOPE. These are a man's words.

ODYSSEUS (*laughs*).

TELEMACHUS. You may laugh, Father, but I can see by your eyes that I've guessed the truth. You don't regret a single thing ; but what the people of Ithaca—your people, our people—have suffered, was not by their own accord, and they have not enjoyed it : they have lost by it—lost homes and goods and lands and even their children and relations—through starvation and ill-treatment. You have lost nothing. Here is your home, your wife, your son ; you have no need to win them back : they were always yours. The people are in a different case : they have learnt to suspect everybody and everything—even the high gods themselves. You will have to show them that they stand to gain more by your return than they would have gained if my mother had given in—

ODYSSEUS (*after a pause*). So that's how it is. I'll handle this to-morrow.

TELEMACHUS. To-morrow is already to-day.

ODYSSEUS. By all the gods ! I can do no more.

(*Music up : then to background.*)

Athene ! Saviour of cities and of men,
Friend and comrade of my youth and manhood,
Do not forsake me now.
Let this be my last ordeal ; for your sake
Let it be the last.
What remains to do here,
Do it for me, in my name
And in yours : in the name of
Wide-winged Artemis,
And in the name of Hermes, watcher of this night
of nights, and of
Apollo, whose mouth has spoken and whose glance
Brings this day of days.

(*Music up and down.*)

THE RESCUE

Let it not be told in heaven
That the steadfastness of Penelope
Was after all in vain.
Unleash at last the dawn ;
Let it shine into the hearts of these island men
And reveal the truth of their rescue.
(*Music up—20 seconds—then add voice.*)

HERMES (*sings*).
O Flower of the Sun,
Apollo's sister !
Bring death to doubt.
Let life flow back again.

ARTEMIS (*sings*).
O Thief of the Gates,
Steal away hearts.
Comfort with hope.
Make believe.

APOLLO (*sings*).
O Rose of the Wind !
Weave the golden thought.
Unfurl the heart's bright seed
In the mind's withered pod.
(*Orchestra up and down.*)

ATHENE (*sings*).
O Crown of Light !
Build again the walls.
Secure the armed blood.
(*Orchestra up and down.*)

HERMES. I make believe.

ARTEMIS. I bring death to doubt.

APOLLO. I build the veins of peace.

ATHENE. I weave the golden thought.
(*Orchestra up and down.*)

ALL TOGETHER. Crown of Light !
Rose of the Wind !
Thief of the Gates !
Flower of the Sun !
We build again the walls.
(*Orchestra up — 1 minute — then down behind
dialogue.*)

PENELOPE. What a long, long kiss !

THE RESCUE

ODYSSEUS. It is the sum of all the kisses I gave you in my mind, through eighteen years.

(Music out.)

PENELOPE. Why then do you keep your eyes closed, now that you have me in your arms?

ODYSSEUS. Because I can see you better like that. For years I have held your image engraved on my eyelids. It was thus when I awoke in the Naiads' cave. Your own face is less real to me . . .

PENELOPE. It is older. Ah! husband, you left me a young girl; you find me a middle-aged woman.

ODYSSEUS. That is nothing. So absolute a face blunts all the weapons of time.

PENELOPE. You say that as if you had said it before—to someone else. But no matter! I do not care to know. I leave to you for ever the secret memory of your trials—your sunlit ecstasies, your tortures in the night of starless months.

ODYSSEUS *(after a pause)*. Those trials, those ecstasies, are more than a memory.

PENELOPE. How can that be?

ODYSSEUS. They are the shape of my life. Just as I had to return here, so I shall go back again . . . some day . . .

PENELOPE. Back? But where?

ODYSSEUS. To the sea and its incomprehensible joys.

PENELOPE. So this is what I have waited for so long . . .

ODYSSEUS. Penelope! Penelope!

PENELOPE. I don't understand you: the years—and-too much else—are between us.

ODYSSEUS. There is nothing between us except the gods. They are stronger than we are. When Poseidon, the Earth-Shaker, decides to call me out again, I shall have no choice but to oblige him. But that will not be yet: Athene will see to it that I finish my work here first. And there is always Telemachus.

PENELOPE. You are trying to console me. You are as bad as poor Eurynome. She tries so hard!

ODYSSEUS. Now you're laughing . . . I see you do understand me after all.

THE RESCUE

PENELOPE (*sighs*). I am a woman. I resign myself. And meanwhile, you are here again.

ODYSSEUS. Take my hand. Come to the window. It is getting light. Those stupid fellows seem to have gone home. I suppose Telemachus sent them packing. How splendid it all looks in the early light . . . ! Whose was that head in the window below us ?

PENELOPE. I saw no one.

ODYSSEUS. I believe it was old Mentor. (*Shouting.*) Mentor ? . . . Hey ! Mentor ! Mentor !

PHEMIUS (*as in first sequence of Part I. Very close to mike at first, then gradually emerging from the frame*). It is not Mentor. You are harmlessly deceived, Odysseus, by one who owes his life to your magnanimity—and, I may add, your sagacity. Phemius the poet salutes you from his shadowed mouth, his changing and elusive shape.

Men seldom know me when they see me.

I am here and not here ; I am

The captured shadow ; the intersection
Of Past and Future ;

The moment of death ;

The mysterious blood of sleep ; the eyes
Of the statue whose gaze is inwards.

Victory and defeat have in me their resolution,
in that

Ever future voice beyond the interval

Where joy and grief are one.


(*Music to background and hold.*)

Think of my face, all you who listen.

Look into my eyes, before they fade into your
night.

Forget the poem I made ; but remember

The purer voice you hear behind my words.

 (*Music up to end.*)

